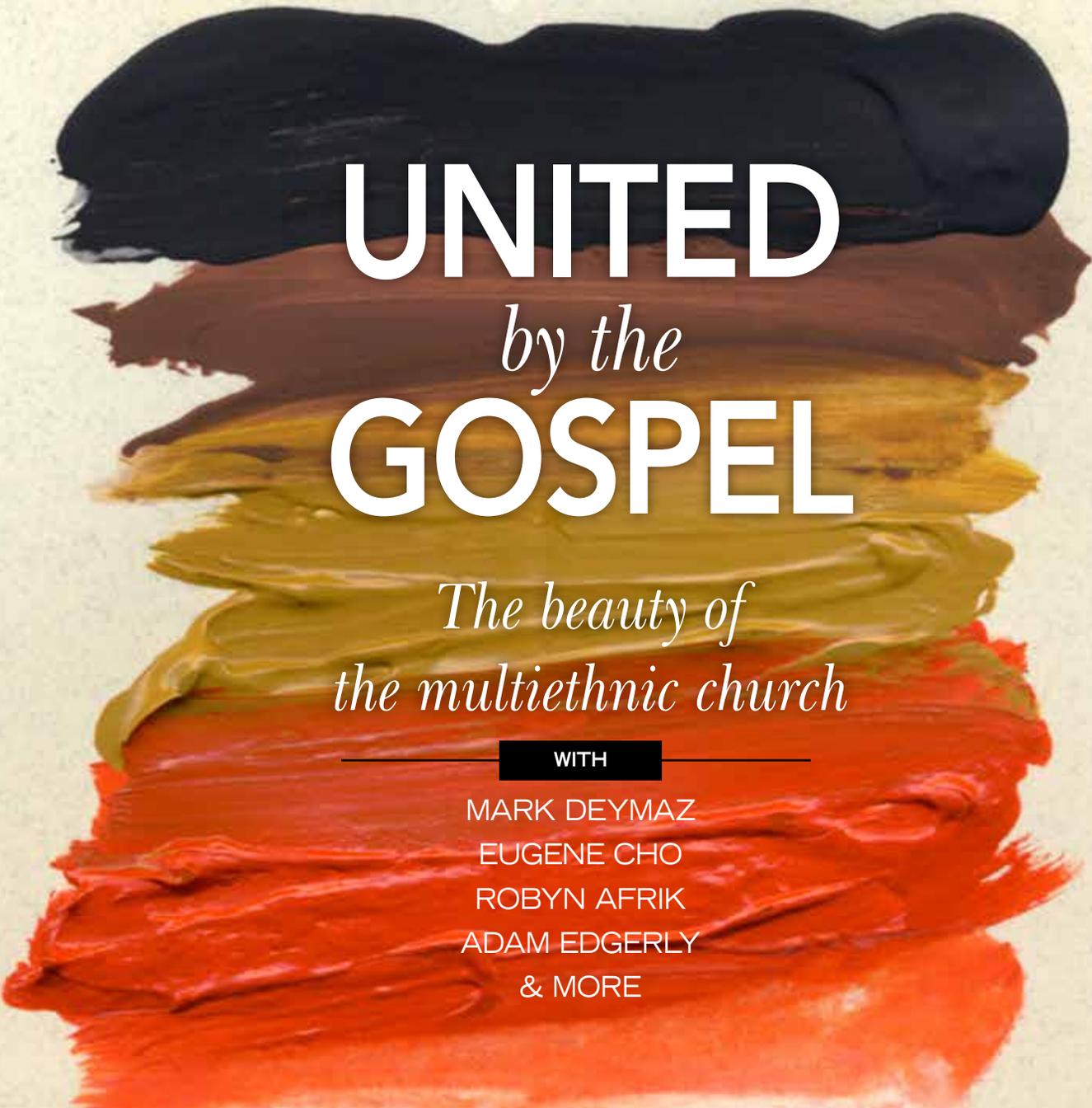


Facts & Trends

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UNITED *by the* GOSPEL

*The beauty of
the multiethnic church*

WITH

MARK DEYMAZ
EUGENE CHO
ROBYN AFRIK
ADAM EDGERLY
& MORE

THE CHANGING
FACE OF THE
AMERICAN CHURCH

STATE OF
THE UNION
Real Secrets of a Happy Marriage

WHO ARE
THE NONES
and How Do We Reach Them?



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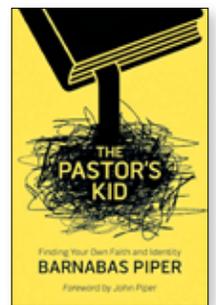
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INSIDE F&T

Every tribe, tongue, and nation

In the Great Commission, Christ tells His followers to go and make disciples of all peoples. God has commissioned us and given us a kingdom focus to engage all peoples—every tribe, tongue, and nation—with the gospel.

The global Church reflects the diversity described in Revelation 7. But why is it that most local expressions of the body of Christ rarely reflect the diversity of the kingdom of God?

The world is becoming much more global and multicultural, and the American landscape reflects this shift. Chances are your community is home to a population of non-English, bilingual, even English-only speakers who practice other religions, eat different food, and who have very different customs from which you are accustomed. The American church is poised to share Christ with the peoples of the world who are now our neighbors.

We need to see the different peoples of our communities with as much clarity as possible if we are going to obey the Great Commission command to make disciples of all peoples.

In this issue, we'll unpack the changing demographics in the United States and the American church. We'll show you a couple of churches that cultivated a multiethnic ministry from their beginnings. And you'll hear from a variety of church leaders who say churches that embrace diversity not only reflect the kingdom of God they are poised to reach their neighbors and the nations. **You can find more articles and resources on this topic at FactsAndTrends.net/multiethnic.**

The Great Commission calls us to make disciples of all peoples. While no church can be all things to all people, the challenge is to be as inclusive to all cultures and ethnicities as possible. The local church should not only proclaim unity in the gospel, but also show it.

Carol Pipes, Editor

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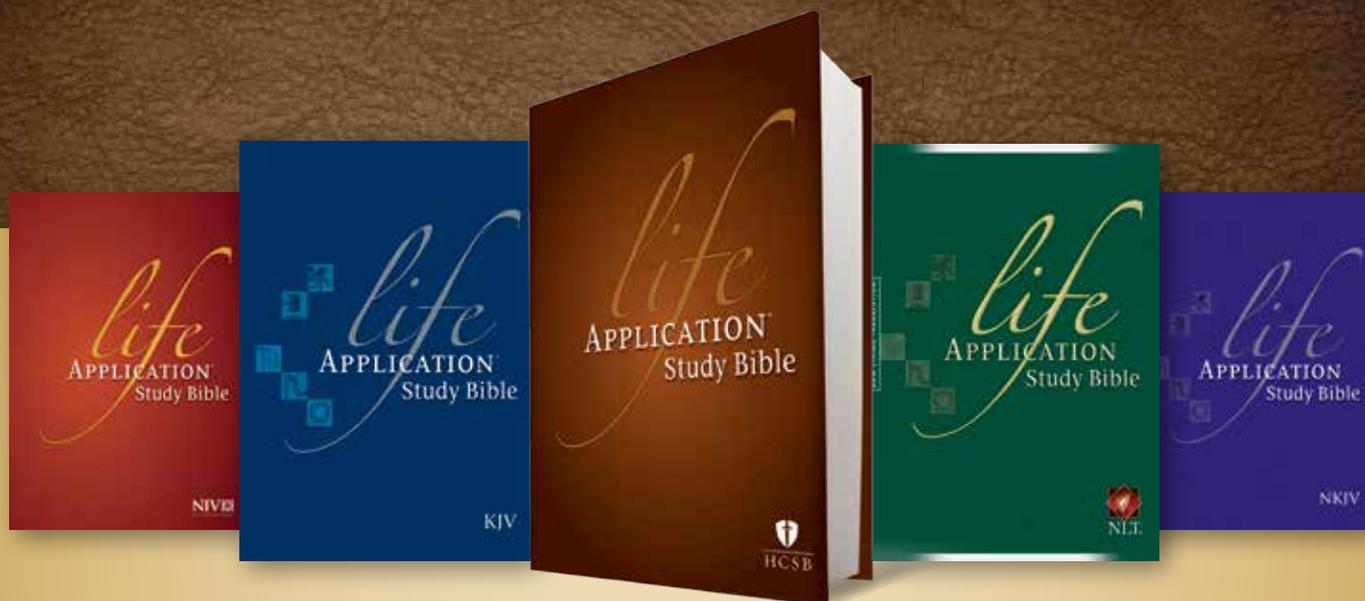


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Is your church reflecting its community?

My research for *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* indicates one of the factors that leads to the decline of a healthy church is its refusal to look like the community. If you compare the faces of a dying church with the faces of the people who live in the community where the church is located, you'll often notice a significant difference.

In many of my consultations with dying churches I heard the same thing: In the “good old days,” the church was booming as residents in the community flocked to the church. The church reflected the community.

Then the community began to change. In some cases the change was ethnic or racial. In other cases it was age-related or socioeconomic. The change was real and the members of the church felt it. One by one, families in the church began to move to other areas of town. And the church failed to transition with the neighborhood.

Occasionally the church made faint attempts to reach out and ask the community to come to them. There was almost never any effort to go into the community. And often people in the community did not feel welcome in the church. Those in the church were more concerned about protecting the way they did church than reaching the residents of the community.

When a church ceases to have a

heart and ministry for its community, it is on the path toward death. But it doesn't have to end that way. Here are five steps your church can take to make sure it reflects your community.

1. Pray God will open the eyes of the leadership and members for opportunities to reach into the community where the church is located.

2. Make specific plans to minister to and to evangelize those who live in your community. Your church must have a presence in the community beyond the facility itself.

3. Immerse yourself in the community. Join the PTO or other civic organizations. Attend local sports events or community concerts. Participate in the lives of the people in your community in whatever way you can. Not only will you begin to establish relationships with those outside your church, but you will learn your community's specific needs.

4. Demonstrate respect for all people. Learn the culture and customs of those moving into your community. The pastor should lead in taking an interest in those who attend the church and those you are trying to reach.

5. Make sure your church is welcoming to all people. Choose your words and sermon illustrations carefully. Don't assume everyone who attends your church will understand

references to American culture. It's important to understand the cultural context of the people who live near the church, especially if the cultural context has shifted. Consider incorporating different styles of music on Sunday morning. Seek diversity in leadership roles—from volunteers to paid staff.

We are beginning to see more churches adopt a multiethnic approach to ministry. Part of the good news in this story is the Millennial factor. Because this generation was raised in multiethnic and multiracial environments, these are no longer barriers for them. Their integration into the multiethnic church seems to be more natural than previous generations. I see them leading the way.

Vibrant and growing churches look after the interests of others. They are concerned for their communities. They open the door for others (Philippians 2:1-4). Is your church reflecting its community? ■

Thom S. Rainer (@ThomRainer) is president of LifeWay Christian Resources.



INSIGHTS

Beliefs, issues, and trends impacting our world

Belief in God essential to morality?

A slight majority (53 percent) of Americans believe that to be a moral person one must believe in God. Those views vary somewhat based on age: 46 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds say belief in God is necessary to be moral, half of those 30-49 say it's necessary, and 58 percent of those over 50 say belief in God is a must to live a moral life.

Education plays an even bigger role. A majority of individuals without a college degree (59 percent) say faith is essential to be an upright person, while fewer than 4-in-10 college graduates say the same (37 percent).

Percent of Americans who believe it is...



Source: Pew Research

Note: Does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Young Americans putting off marriage

49%

In 2013, 49 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds had never been married. By 2010, never-married Americans aged 25-34 started outnumbering their currently married peers, according to the U.S. Census.

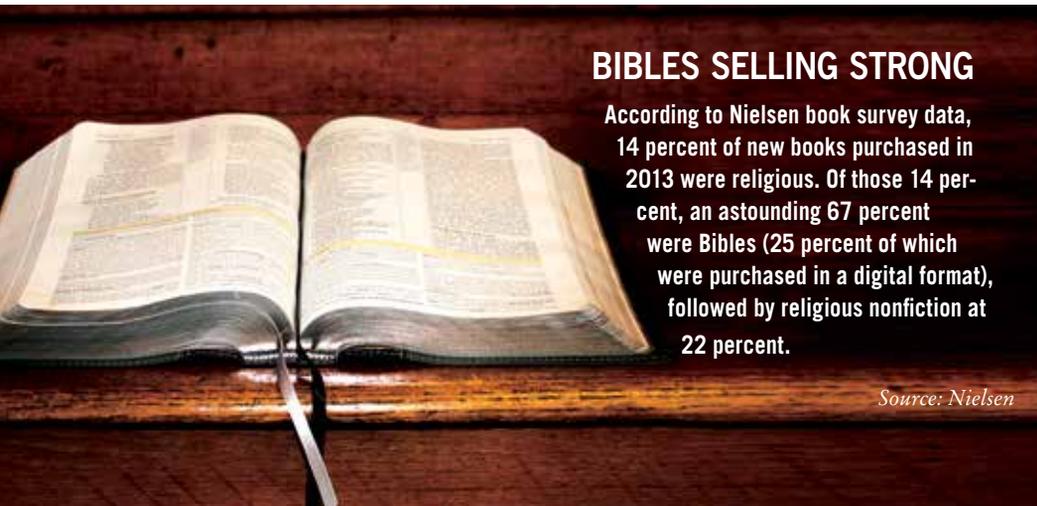
Source: American Community Survey and U.S. Census

Support for gay marriage continues to rise

55%

Americans' support for gay marriage has reached a new high of 55 percent. In addition, a clear majority of Americans (63 percent) say same-sex couples should have the legal right to adopt a child, the most to say so since Gallup began tracking opinions on the matter more than 20 years ago. Young people between the ages of 18 and 29 are most likely to support same-sex marriage (78 percent) and same-sex adoption (77 percent), when compared to older age groups. Support for both declines with each successive age group.

Source: Gallup



BIBLES SELLING STRONG

According to Nielsen book survey data, 14 percent of new books purchased in 2013 were religious. Of those 14 percent, an astounding 67 percent were Bibles (25 percent of which were purchased in a digital format), followed by religious nonfiction at 22 percent.

Source: Nielsen

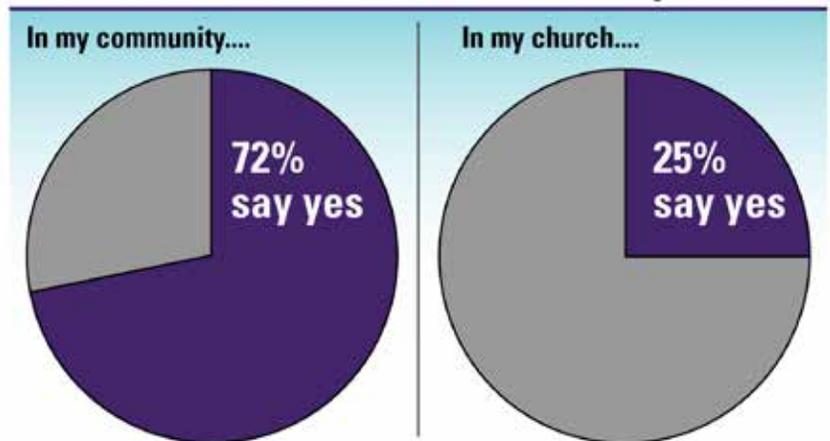
Domestic violence

LifeWay Research found about 4 in 10 pastors (43 percent) rarely or never speak about domestic violence. Less than a quarter (22 percent) speak to their church about the issue once a year. Pastors also tend to downplay the possibility that domestic violence can affect their congregation. For pastors who don't address the issue, about 3 in 10 (29 percent) say domestic violence is not a problem in their church. Pastors who do speak about domestic violence are more likely to say it is a problem for their community (72 percent) than their church (25 percent.).

LifeWay Research also found half of senior pastors (52 percent) say they don't have sufficient training to address cases of domestic or sexual violence. And

Among Protestant pastors who speak to their church about the subject:

Is domestic or sexual violence a problem?



about 8 in 10 (81 percent) say they would take action to reduce domestic violence if they had more training. In addition, most pastors (74 percent) say they know of a friend, family member, or church member who has experienced domestic violence. And most (83 percent) say

they've turned to outside experts to address cases of domestic violence. But more than half (62 percent) say they've also provided "couples or marriage counseling" to those experiencing domestic violence.

Source: LifeWay Research (LifeWayResearch.com)

“AT THE END OF THE DAY, LEADERSHIP WITHOUT LOVE IS JUST CAREFUL MANIPULATION.”

— Jonathan Pearson,

Next Up: 8 Shifts Great Young Leaders Make

I know what you did last Sunday

Americans exaggerate church attendance, according to a Public Religion Research Institute study. PRRI asked Americans identical questions about religious attendance, affiliation, and belief in God on two surveys—one via telephone and the other online—and compared the results. In the impersonal online survey, participants were less likely to inflate their levels of religious participation. Young adults, Catholics, and white

mainline Protestants are particularly likely to inflate the frequency of their attendance at religious services. Among the findings:

- On the telephone survey, 36 percent of Americans report attending religious services weekly or more, compared to 31 percent on the online survey.
- 30 percent of telephone respondents say they seldom or never attend religious services, compared to 43

percent of online survey respondents.

- Fewer than 3-in-10 (29 percent) white mainline Protestants report they seldom or never attend religious services, compared to 45 percent of white mainline Protestants who took the online survey.

Source: Public Religion Research Institute



Fast-growing and fastest-shrinking cities in America

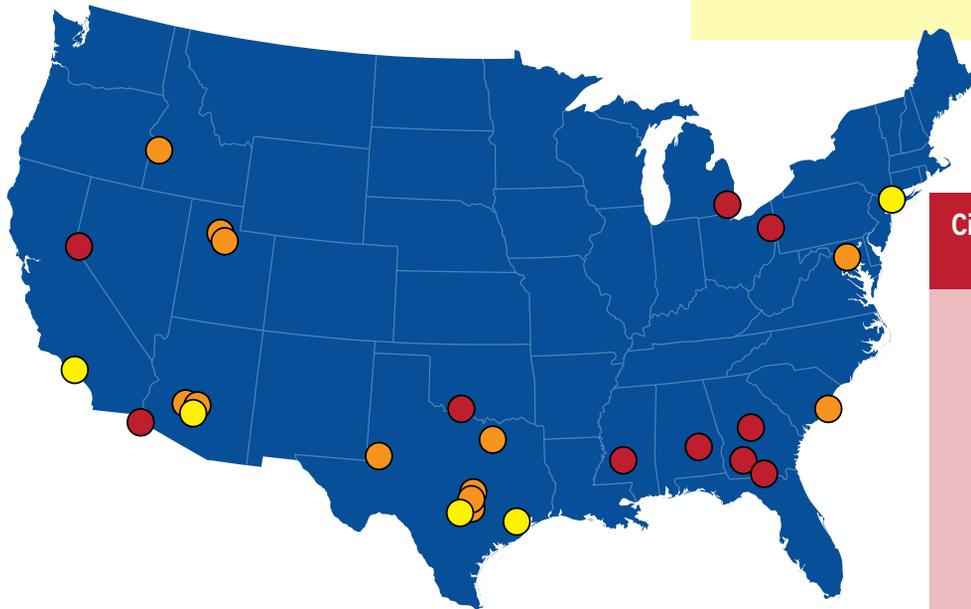
American cities are always in flux, with some booming and others shrinking. Based on estimates of the 2013 population, the U.S. Census Bureau identified the 12 cities that grew by at least 4 percent from 2012-2013. They also identified the 10 cities that declined by at least 1 percent.

Top 5 population increases by numeric growth

- New York City : 61,440
- Houston : 35,202
- Los Angeles : 31,525
- San Antonio : 25,378
- Phoenix : 24,843

Cities that grew at least 4% between 2012-13

- San Marcos, TX : 8.0%
- Frisco, TX : 6.5%
- South Jordan, UT : 6.1%
- Cedar Park, TX : 5.6%
- Lehi, UT : 5.5%
- Goodyear, AZ : 4.8%
- Georgetown, TX : 4.5%
- Gaithersburg, MD : 4.4%
- Mt. Pleasant, SC : 4.1%
- Gilbert, AZ : 4.0%
- Meridian, ID : 4.0%
- Odessa, TX : 4.0%



Cities that shrank by at least 1% between 2012-13

- Valdosta, GA : -2.1%
- Montgomery, AL : -1.6%
- Jackson, MS : -1.5%
- Albany, GA : -1.4%
- Detroit, MI : -1.4%
- Lawton, OK : -1.4%
- Macon, GA : -1.3%
- Yuma, AZ : -1.2%
- Carson City, NV : -1.0%
- Youngstown, OH : -1.0%

Source: Business Insider & U.S. Census Bureau

Are women in church stressed out?

by Chris Adams

A recent study indicates most women are stressed out, tired, and overcommitted. The Barna Group surveyed American women to find out exactly how they feel about their commitments to family, church, career, and community, and about the tensions that seem to pull them in opposite directions. Here's what they found. A majority of women (59 percent) are dissatisfied with their balance between work and home life. Among moms with children still at home, this rate increases to 62 percent. Eight in 10 moms feel overwhelmed by stress (compared to 72 percent of all women), and 7 out of 10 say they do not get enough rest (compared to 58 percent of all women). The real kicker is 88 percent of all women

and 95 percent of moms want to do better in a least one area of life.

When women are told by our culture they can do it all, have it all, and do it well, they are given an impossible role to fill. The good news is the majority (76 percent) of women in both camps are satisfied with their lives in the midst of it all.

How can the church help?

1. Give them a break.

Encourage them to put their family first. Provide ideas and ministry opportunities that include children and spouses

whenever possible.

2. Help women discover their gifts, skills, and interests.

Show her where those intersect with needs in the church and community. Help her hone her skills and allow her to say "no" to

8 in 10 moms feel overwhelmed by stress.





Government restrictions on religion:

More than 5 billion people live in countries with high or very high levels of government restrictions on religion.

Source: Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project

“BEFORE YOU CAN LEAD A MULTIETHNIC MINISTRY, YOU HAVE TO LIVE A MULTIETHNIC LIFE.”

— Derwin Gray, Transformation Church

other opportunities that arise if the Lord has not given her those assignments.

3. Teach her how to make Scripture and a daily walk with Christ her greatest priority. If she will seek God on a daily basis, she will learn how to discern His voice and direction for serving her church and community.

4. Equip her in practical ways. Find out what issues she is facing and design studies and groups that offer support and knowledge around those topics.

5. Understand her many responsibilities and pray for her and with her! Let her know you see her struggles and want to walk alongside her.

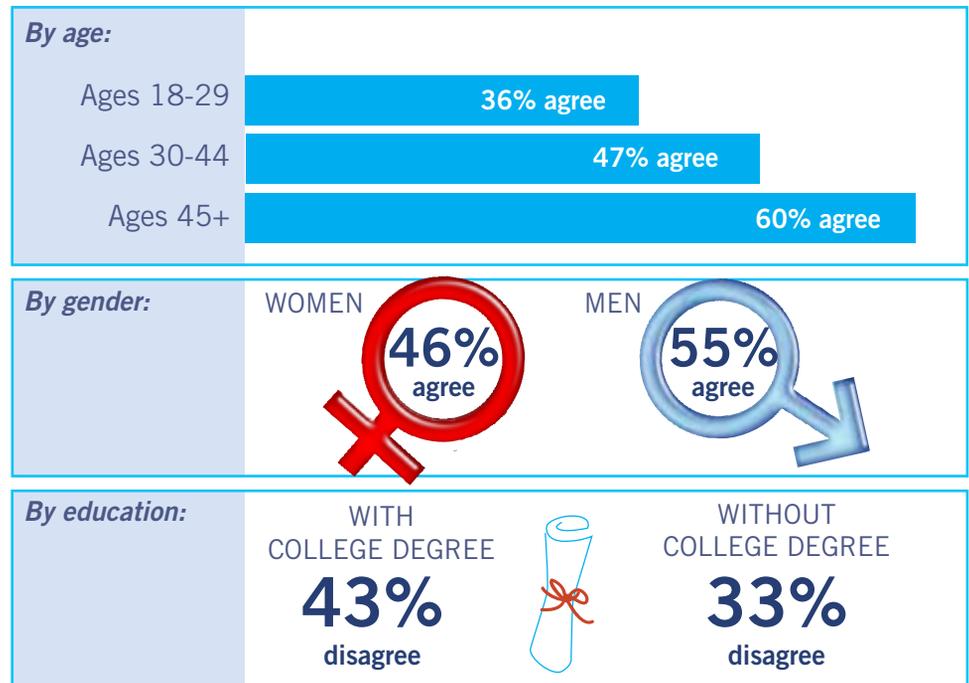
Source: Barna Group

Chris Adams is senior lead women’s ministry specialist at LifeWay.

Teaching the Bible in school?

Do you believe students should learn about the Bible in the classroom? If you said yes, you’re not alone. A recent online study by LifeWay Research found 51 percent of adults across America believe the Bible should be taught in public school because of its historical significance.

The Bible should be taught in public schools because it is historically significant.



By the numbers:

- 81 percent of born-again, evangelical, and fundamentalist Christians agree the Bible should be taught in public schools.
- Southerners are most likely to agree (60 percent) compared to those in the Midwest (51 percent), Northeast (44 percent), and West (40 percent).

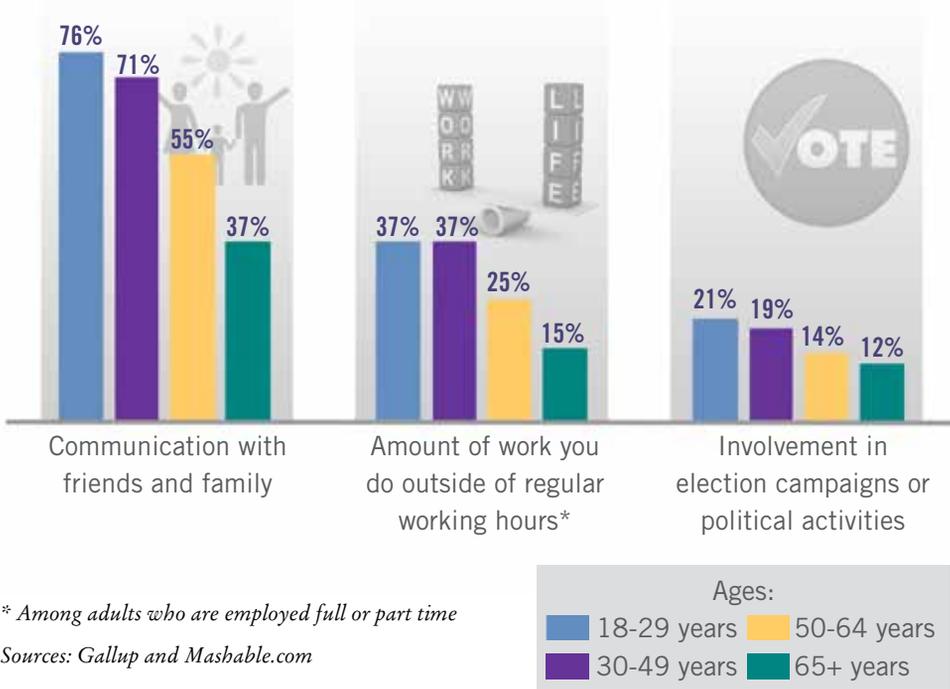
Source: LifeWay Research



More mobile tech = longer work hours

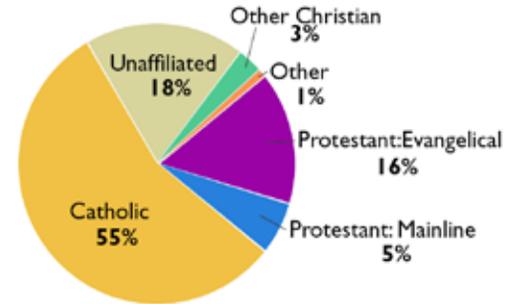
Thirty-seven percent of employed American adults between the ages of 18 and 29 said that mobile technology greatly increases the amount of work they do outside of work hours. In the same age group, 76 percent of respondents said mobile increases their amount of communication, while 21 percent said it increased their involvement in election campaigns and other political activities.

Percent of Americans whose activities increased due to mobile technology



Shifting religious identity of Latinos

Percent of Hispanics who identify as ...



Note: Pew Research Data from 2013. Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

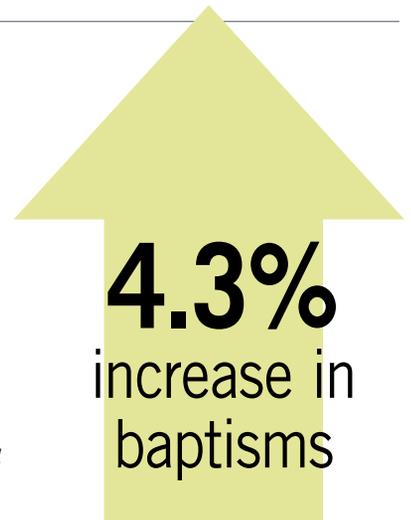
America's 53 million Latinos now make up the country's largest ethnic minority. A majority (55 percent) of the nation's estimated 35.4 million Latino adults identify as Catholic today. That signals a drop of about 12 percent over the last four years. Hispanics leaving Catholicism have tended to move in two directions. About 16 percent now describe themselves as born-again or evangelical, and 18 percent are now religiously unaffiliated.

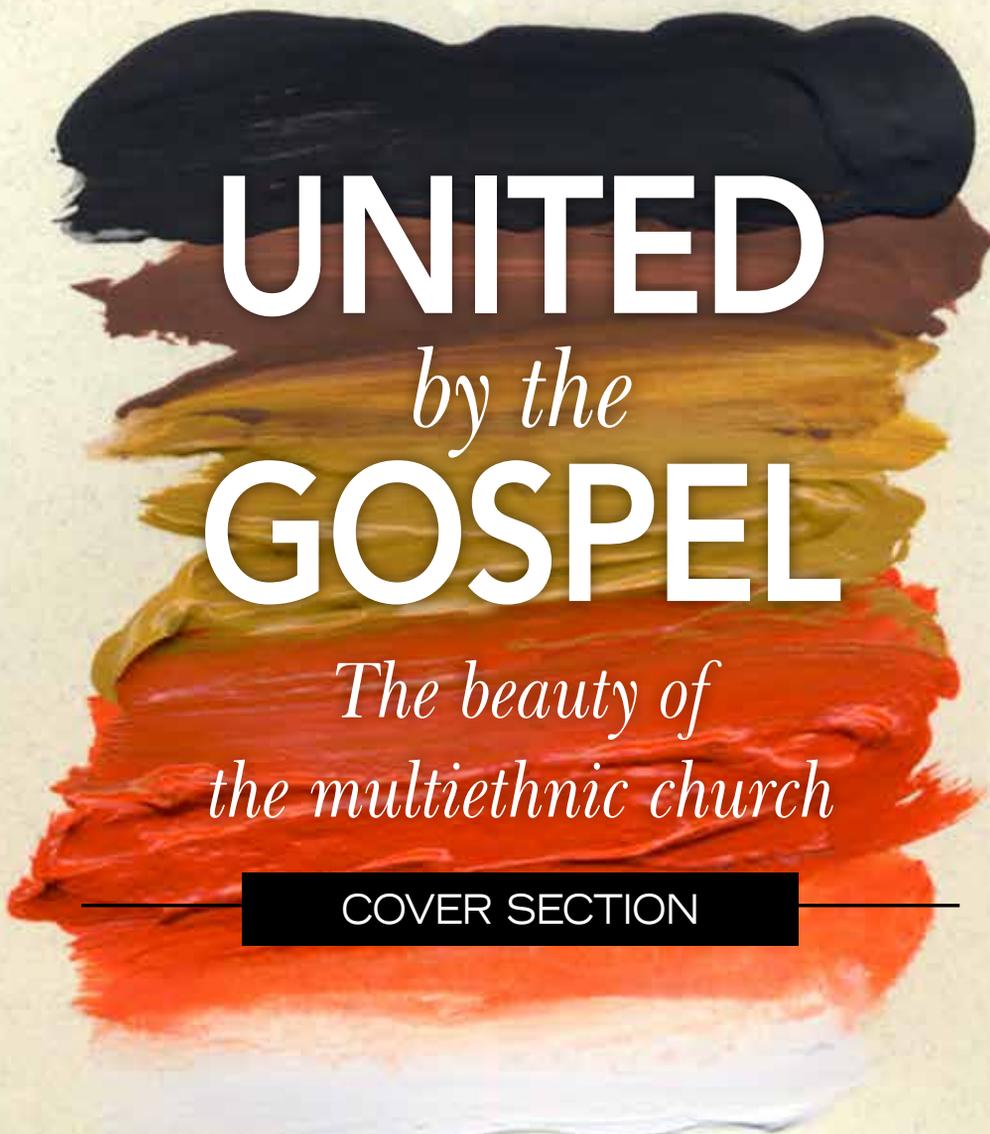
Source: Pew Forum

Assemblies of God sees growth

The Assemblies of God experienced its 24th year of attendance growth in the United States. The AG denomination, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, reported a slight increase in attendance from 2012 to 2013, bringing their total number of adherents in the U.S. to 3.1 million, up from 3.09 million. According to the AG National Leadership & Resource Center, in 2013 in the United States, the AG churches recorded 137,375 water baptisms up from 131,713 in 2012. The denomination credits its national growth to the United States' growing Latino population, which they say makes up 20 percent of their American population.

Source: Assemblies of God





UNITED *by the* GOSPEL

*The beauty of
the multiethnic church*

COVER SECTION

The Bible gives us a compelling vision for diversity in the kingdom of God. Throughout all of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, we see God working to redeem a people for Himself, a people from every tribe and tongue and nation—colorful and diverse. The church’s pursuit of diversity reflects the Bible’s description of God’s kingdom. And in the 21st Century, it will be the unity of diverse believers walking as one—in and through the local church—that will proclaim the fact of God’s love for all people and provide the most effective means for reaching the world with the gospel.

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The changing face of the American church

By Bob Smietana

For a look at the future of the church in America, it's time for pastors to go back to school. Not to seminary—but to their local public schools.

More than half the students (50.3 percent) nationwide are ethnic minorities, according to the U.S. Department of Education. That's up from 37 percent in 1997, according to Pew Research. This is just one sign of how the United States is becoming a multiethnic nation.

Consider this: In 1960, 85 percent of Americans were white, about 11 percent were black, with other minority groups making up the remaining 4 percent. Today, only 63 percent of Americans are white.

By 2043, the Census Department predicts no one ethnic group will hold a majority. By 2060, an estimated 57 percent of Americans will be people of color (black, Hispanic, and other).

For American Christians, the changes have been even more dramatic—at least on a demographic level. Among older Americans (those over 65), 7 out of 10 are white Christians. By contrast, only about a quarter of younger (18- to 29-year-olds) Americans are white Christians. In addition, more than half of younger Christians are people of color, according to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI).

Yet few American congregations reflect these changes.

A 2013 LifeWay Research survey of 1,007 Protestant senior pastors found

more than 8 in 10 (85 percent) believe every church should strive for racial diversity. But few pastors have diverse flocks. Most (86 percent) of their congregations are predominately one racial or ethnic group.

“Everybody wants diversity,” says Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research. “But many don’t want to be around people who are different.”

By 2043, the Census Department predicts no one ethnic group will hold a majority.

Embracing diversity

For many evangelical churches, diversity has long been considered a kind of luxury. Few churches see it as part of their mission.

“In my experience, most see it as nice but not essential,” says Alvin Sanders, author of *Bridging the Diversity Gap*.

Sanders, associate executive director of national ministries for the Evangelical Free Church of America, says many evangelicals support the idea of diversity. But few really work to make it happen in local churches.

“If you ask, would you like to have a multiethnic church, everyone says, ‘that would be wonderful,’” says Sanders. “When you ask, what are you doing to make that happen—that’s when you

hear the crickets.”

Sanders pointed out that only about 13 percent of Protestant churches are considered multiethnic—where at least 20 percent of the congregation is a minority—according to the 2010 Faith Communities Today survey.

According to Sanders, that won’t cut it in a time of growing diversity. He says evangelicals will be hampered in their mission to share the gospel unless multiethnic churches become more common.

“I predict that if [multiethnic churches] don’t become the norm—we are not going to reach our country. Anyone who looks at demographics knows this,” he says.

Still, Sanders believes there are signs of hope, especially in the small but growing number of multiethnic churches.

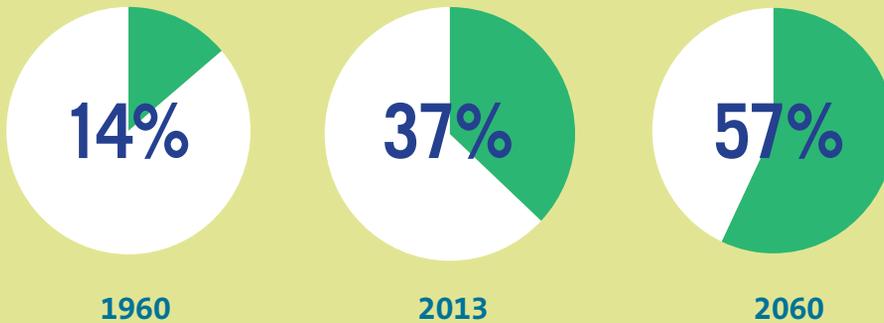
Sanders, who planted a multiethnic church called River of Life Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, interviewed leaders of 31 church plants from eight denominations, for a recent research project. The churches in the study—done in conjunction with LifeWay Research—were at least two years old. All had been intentionally planted as multiethnic churches, says Sanders.

They succeeded, he says, primarily because their approach to multiethnicity was based on missional theology. Racial reconciliation was a by-product.

“They believe it is the biblical thing to do,” he says. “Not the politically correct thing to do. Not the latest trend.”

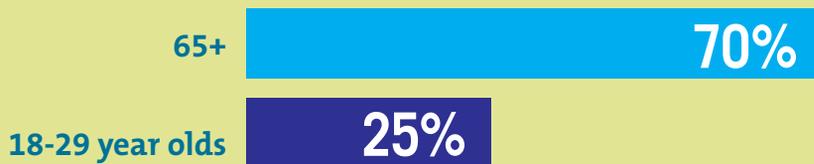
POPULATION MAKEUP OF AMERICA

Percentage of ethnic minorities in America increases over time



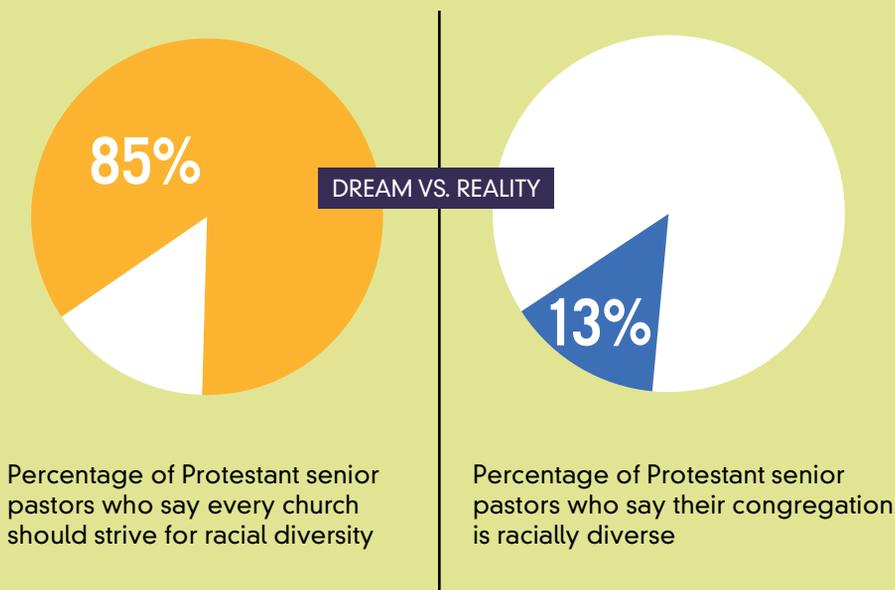
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Percentage of white Christians among age groups



Source: Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI)

Survey of Protestant Senior Pastors



Source: LifeWay Research

Like most churches, leaders of those congregations wanted to reach their communities. Since their communities were diverse—these church plants had to be diverse as well.

“They had a bigger overarching goal: to reach their neighborhood for Jesus,” he says. “How many more multiethnic churches would we have today if we just activated our churches to reach their communities? I’d say we’d have significantly more multiethnic churches if we did that.”

One size doesn’t fit all

Robyn Afrik, a national speaker, consultant, and strategist on issues related to diversity, says there’s no one-size-fits-all approach to building a multiethnic church. A church plant, for example, will take a different approach to becoming diverse than an older congregation.

Diversity can’t just be another strategy or numbers game, says Afrik. Instead, “it’s a gospel thing.” Before churches can talk about diversity, they have to talk about theology and evangelism. For many churches, she says, evangelism and reaching out to the community isn’t high on their agenda. If the congregation isn’t ready to reach out to its neighbors, it’s unlikely to become diverse.

One of the first challenges to becoming multiethnic is thinking through how to integrate new people into the church family. She says many churches say they welcome people from all races

and cultures. But that can end up meaning minorities are always treated as guests rather than full-fledged members of the local family of faith.

Bringing in new people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds means the identity of the congregation will change. New people will have new priorities and often very different points of view. That can be hard for older church members to deal with, especially if they are from a dominant ethnic group.

Becoming multiethnic also means giving up on the idea of being “color-blind.” Sanders says many evangelical leaders try to act as if race doesn’t matter. Pastors often tell him, “Alvin I don’t see you as a black man—I just see you as a man.”

That may be well intentioned, he says, but it’s harmful to real diversity.

“They are not acknowledging the way God made me,” Sanders says. “He made me with black skin for a reason. For you not to see that is not helpful.”

Christena Cleveland, author of *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart*, says becoming a multiethnic congregation “changes everything.”

Cleveland, professor of reconciliation studies at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota, says homogenous churches have the advantage of relying on unconscious short cuts—since church members share assumptions about how churches should operate.

Becoming multiethnic is a bit like traveling to a new country, where you don’t speak the language and don’t understand the cultural norms. It can cause a kind of “cognitive fatigue,” she says. “You don’t even know what assumptions you have. People can get really touchy very quickly.”

Cleveland says becoming a multiethnic church requires what she calls “humble dependence.”

That can be hard for many white

The reason we should have multiethnic churches is not because the demographics are changing—but because it is at the heart of the gospel.”

— Derwin Gray

Christians, she says, because they’re used to being in majority. Being the majority means having power. And many churches can get caught in between demographics, where older people of one race have all the power and control, and diverse young people are left out of the decision-making.

She says church members and pastors have to be humble enough to ask for help, especially in learning how to cope with new demographics. Despite the struggles involved in crossing ethnic, cultural, and racial lines, Cleveland says being part of a multiethnic church brings many blessings.

“It’s one of those things you have to experience before you can value it,” she

says. “You’ve been missing something and you didn’t know it.”

Heart of the matter

The future of American Christianity, says Derwin Gray, pastor of Transformation Church in Indian Land, South Carolina, will belong to churches that are multiethnic, because that’s what God wants. He points to a section of the book of Revelation: “After this I looked,” says Revelation 7:9, “and there before me was a great multitude that

no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

“The reason we should have multiethnic churches is not because the demographics of America are changing—but because it is at the heart of the gospel,” he says.

The Rev. Efre Smith, a former church planter and author of *The Post-Black and Post-White Church*, agrees. Diversity has become a necessity for churches, says Smith. “That’s good news, It’s going to push us to a more authentic presentation of the gospel and a more authentic faith.” ■

Bob Smietana (@BobSmietana) is senior writer and content editor of Facts & Trends.

United by Love

How diversity reflects the kingdom of God

By Trillia Newbell

In the last 50 years, the term diversity has taken on many meanings. In the early 1960s, diversity most likely would have referred to the need for desegregation. By the '70s and '80s it would've been associated with affirmative action. Now diversity is often regarded as inclusivity in a myriad of ways.

The Bible, however, gives us a compelling vision for diversity in the kingdom of God. Diversity is already quite present in God's kingdom, but we might miss it in Scripture if we aren't looking for it. Here are four ways we can see a biblical basis for diversity and how it reflects the kingdom.

Creation: Image Bearers

We are all created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Not one of us was made apart from the creative, thoughtful design of our Creator God (Psalm 139:13-14). As image bearers, we were all made to reflect the Lord. So, if we are all created equally in the image of God, then as redeemed image bearers this is the first indication God's kingdom is diverse. We are created equally in His image. God doesn't discriminate in His design—He doesn't create one human being greater than the other. Because we are all image bearers, we can know God's kingdom includes a variety of people groups—all ultimately created to reflect and worship Him.

Redemption: Gospel

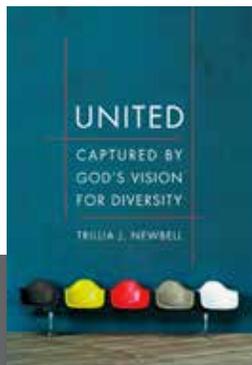
We are all created in need of God's saving grace regardless of the color of

our skin. The Fall of Man affects us all, and we all fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The good news is Jesus died for every tribe, tongue, and nation. God loved the world and made it possible for anyone who believes to have eternal life. He made the way for all people (John 3:15-16). His mission was to seek and save the lost—everyone.

The Great Commission reminds us God's mission is our mission: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20 emphasis mine). Jesus commissioned His disciples to make more disciples of all nations. He didn't say, "Go and find people who look and sound just like you." He said they (and we) should seek to love and serve people from every nation.

“ONLY IN THE FAMILY OF GOD CAN PEOPLE SO DISTINCTLY DIFFERENT BE THE SAME (EQUAL IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION) AND COUNTED AS SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN A NEW FAMILY.”

— Trilla Newbell



DIG DEEPER

- *United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity* by Trillia Newbell

Adoption: The Family of God

As Christians we are adopted children of God. Paul tells us of our new bloodline when he writes: “The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17). We are children of God and a fellow heir with Christ.

Even before His death, Jesus affirmed the importance of being a part of the family of God. Addressing the people while His mother and brothers stood outside, Jesus said, “‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’ And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven, that person is My brother and sister and mother’” (Matthew 12:48–50).

Jesus isn’t suggesting our biological families are no longer important (see Matthew 15:3). Rather, He is stating that following Him is far greater. He takes priority, and so does His kingdom—so much so that those who follow Him are counted as His brother and sister and mother—His family. The family of God, the kingdom of God, is colorful.

As we begin to view members of our churches as members of God’s family—and thus as members of our family—our prejudices begin to crumble. Understanding the family of God is yet another weapon against racial intolerance in the church and beyond.

Only in the family of God can people so distinctly different be the same (equal in creation and redemption) and counted as sisters and brothers in a new family.

Revelation: Last days

Revelation records striking accounts of the last days when all nations, tribes, and tongues will be worshipping Jesus. Heaven won’t be filled with homogeneous people—except that we will all be glorified. What we won’t have in heaven is the sin that separates us from God and from each other. We won’t fight against racism or wonder how to build diversity. We will be diverse. We will love completely and fully. We will worship together and enjoy one another for all eternity.

Creation, redemption, adoption, and revelation prove there is a diverse kingdom. Throughout all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, we see God working to redeem a people for Himself, a people from every tribe and tongue and nation—colorful and diverse. The church’s pursuit of diversity reflects the Bible’s description of the kingdom. We pursue diversity because the pages of Scripture are filled with it. Mostly we pursue diversity because the gospel embraces and advocates for a diversity of people to be born again into a new family for a holy and good God. ■

Trillia Newbell (@TrilliaNewbell) is author of United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity and consultant on Women's Initiatives for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

The quest to transform a church

By Rick Lund



Seattle Pastor Eugene Cho testifies to the beauty of a grace-filled, multiethnic church

In the latter stages of its 50-year-plus history, Interbay Covenant Church looked a lot like other urban churches in its denomination—an aging, predominately white congregation whose most fruitful years of ministry were behind them.

Today, the church building at the corner of 15th Avenue West and West Dravus Street northwest of downtown

Seattle still stands. But what's going on inside the 1960s-era, brick building with the curved wood beams is nothing short of amazing.

Now called Quest Church, it is a thriving, multiethnic, multicultural, and multigenerational congregation that is making an impact in a city and region regarded as one of the “least churched” in the United States.

And Quest's almost-overnight success

is due in no small part to a jaw-dropping gift from an unlikely partner—the Interbay congregation.

In 2002, Interbay took on a \$300,000 loan to renovate a warehouse on the church's property for Quest, which didn't have a church home at the time.

In 2007, Interbay handed over the keys to its own building after voting to merge with Quest. In doing so, Interbay gave the much younger

congregation its debt-free building and made Quest pastor Eugene Cho the lead pastor of the two combined churches.

When Quest Church started in a living room in Seattle with seven people, Cho dreamed it would become a diverse congregation. That dream is now a reality. Quest is about 40 percent Asian American, 40 percent white, with African-Americans and Hispanics making up the remaining 20 percent.

“I’m grateful, because this has been part of our vision from the genesis of our church,” says Cho, a dynamic preacher who is in demand as a speaker around the U.S. and internationally.

“Having said that, it’s been really difficult. But we’re encouraged that this is a vision that is inspired by the Holy Spirit, inspired by the Scriptures, and is a glimpse of what the kingdom of God is and what it will look like for eternity.”

Passing the baton

At the time of their merger seven years ago, Interbay and Quest were very different congregations.

Quest was predominantly Asian American—most in their 20s and single—whose pastor, Cho, was a 36-year-old, hip, Korean-born American. Interbay’s congregation was largely white, over age 50 with familiar ties to its Swedish heritage (the church was founded in the 1950s by Swedish Americans), and led by a former

Boeing engineer, 61-year-old pastor Ray Bartel.

When traditional met hip, there were some awkward moments.

“All of a sudden you’re working through power decision issues, and we’re having Korean food at our meetings,” says Barbara Lundquist, 80, a longtime Interbay member who remains at Quest today. “When you get down to food and music, that’s when things really hit the fan.”

Some Interbay folks missed the old hymns and complained Quest’s worship band played too loud. Quest leaders also replaced the traditional pews in the sanctuary with chairs to give Sunday worship a more informal feel.

What’s more, the twenty-something members of the Quest congregation who initially arrived in 2002 were now getting married and having children.

“Babies were crawling around all over the place,” says Lundquist. “We (the Interbay congregation) were older and not used to being around a lot of babies.”

Of the 50 to 60 people from Interbay who joined Quest, Cho estimates 20 to 30 have stayed. Some of those who left were already commuting long distances to Interbay and chose to find another church. Others preferred the smaller congregation of Interbay, or weren’t enamored with the changes that came with the merger.

But what has transpired for those who have stuck it out, says Lundquist,

is “a miracle, an absolute blessing to the core.”

A lot of those early kinks in the initial phases of the merger have been ironed out as hard attitudes and unfamiliarity gave way to harmony, acceptance, and grace, she says.

“We know God’s kingdom is for all of us,” Lundquist says. “All ethnicities are there. It’s a blessing to live in that, and see it happening. There was some roughness at first because we were unfamiliar with each other. But we sit next to each other in worship and we’re speaking across cultural boundaries.”

Quest, on the other hand, benefited from the wisdom of the Interbay folks.

“You can’t fabricate time, you can’t fabricate experience,” says Cho, who turns 44 this year. “We have these Interbay brothers and sisters who are in their 80s and they have a lot of wisdom. Their perspective is incredibly critical for a church like ours.”

A case in point is the 68-year-old Bartel, who originally planned to bow out a year after overseeing the transition. But he has remained on staff as associate pastor, in charge of pastoral care and other special projects. His administrative skills have been invaluable to Quest.

“Pastor Ray gave up being a senior pastor for this (the merger),” says Lundquist. “But Pastor Eugene is thriving with him. Pastor Ray is so good with finances, pastoral care,

“Begin with the gospel, so it infiltrates hearts and souls so much that it can’t help but imagine or reimagine what the church can look like and should look like.”

— Eugene Cho

seeing things in an objective way.”

Cho says today the merger is rarely mentioned. But he hasn’t forgotten the sacrifice the Interbay congregation made.

It was an amazing expression of God’s grace,” Cho says. “They didn’t need to do that. But because they were inspired by a larger kingdom vision, they realized there were a lot of things they wanted to do but weren’t able to do them for a lot of complex reasons.”

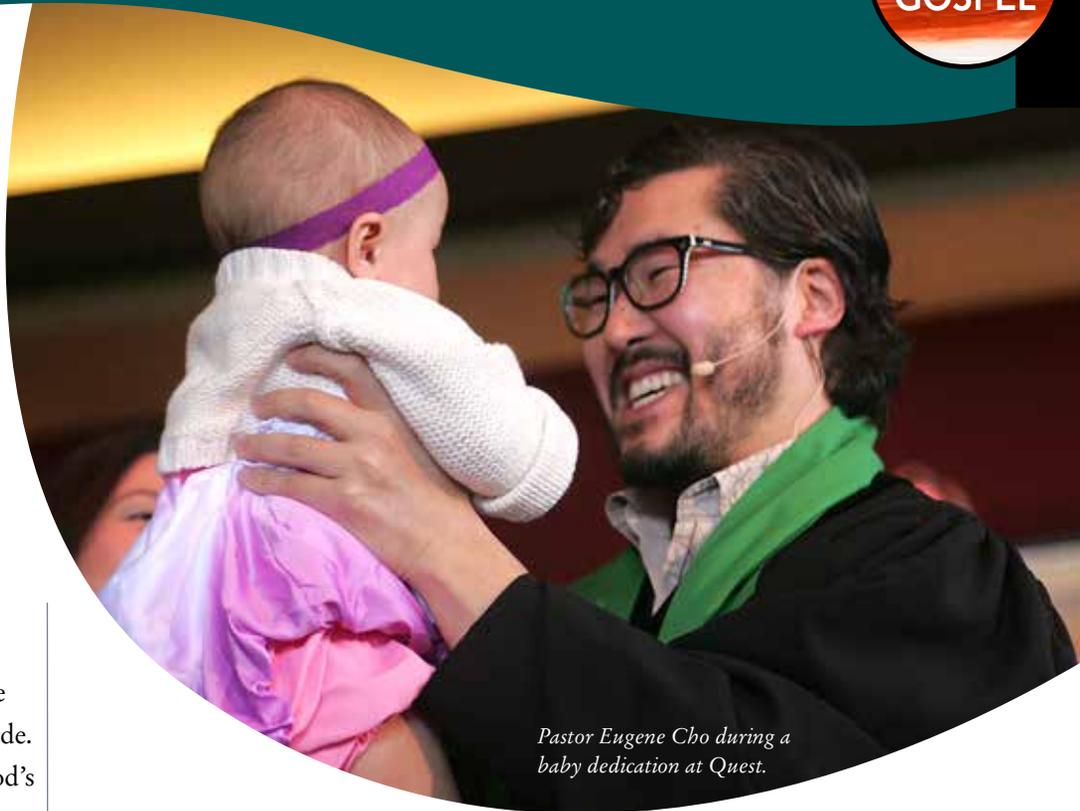
The future of Quest

Quest averages around 700 in weekly attendance between two Sunday services, including children.

With growth, however, come challenges. Quest has grown out of its 300-seat capacity sanctuary, and its Christian education space strains to accommodate 170-180 children younger than fifth grade, says Cho. There is talk of adding a third service.

“God is doing amazing things here,” Bartel says. “We’re using every square-inch of our facilities.”

Which is why Quest recently came close to selling its property and facilities, and acquiring a much larger building in north Seattle. The church, however, has



Pastor Eugene Cho during a baby dedication at Quest.

“hit the pause button” on such a move, says Cho. The board didn’t sense there was momentum from the larger congregation for a re-location.

Quest is committed to its urban identity and, ideally, would like to be in a neighborhood that is more diverse than its current site. The area the church draws from now is one of the most homogeneous of Seattle, according to Cho.

Wherever Quest ends up, Cho says they desire to be a church that knows the city it ministers to and tries to be relevant to the larger culture. That can be a challenge in the Pacific Northwest’s largest city—one known to be indifferent, if not hostile, to the gospel.

“We live in the context of the Northwest, where there is some antagonism against the church,” Cho says. “It means building relationships with our neighbors in the city. It’s taken us 13-14 years to listen well to our city.

“The most important thing for us is the gospel. So we want to make sure our convictions and our belief in the gospel is so powerful it permeates everything we do. That it informs and transforms everything.

“Don’t begin with multiethnicity,” says Cho. “Begin with the gospel, so it infiltrates hearts and souls so much that it can’t help but imagine or reimagine what the church can look like and should look like.”

Surely the old Swedes who began ministry in the Interbay sector of Seattle would be in full agreement with that. ■

Rick Lund is news presentation editor at The Seattle Times.



ETHNIC BLENDS

Growing healthy, multiethnic churches

By Mark DeYmaz

Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” (Matthew 6:10).

So let us ask: If the kingdom of heaven is not segregated then why on earth is the church?

Only about 1 in 7 churches in the United States is considered multiethnic—where 20 percent of the congregation is racially diverse—according to a study by Michael Emerson and the 2010 Faith Communities Today survey.

Emerson, a Rice University sociologist, says most churches are 10 times more segregated than the neighborhoods they’re in, and 20 times more segregated than nearby public schools.

This means most American churches don’t look like America.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about half of children today under the age of 5 are minorities; by 2019 this will be true of young people under the age of 18, as it will of the entire population by 2043.

We should be concerned about the makeup of our churches not merely for diversity’s sake, nor due to changing demographics. We should be concerned because an increasingly diverse and cynical society is no longer finding credible our message of God’s love for *all people* as preached from segregated pulpits and pews. Failure

on our part to recognize the changing landscape or to adapt in accordance with Scripture may soon render our work, or worse yet *our message*, irrelevant.

In his book, *The American Church in Crisis*, author and church-planting expert David Olsen says between 1990 and 2009 the population of the United States grew by more than 56 million. But the membership rolls of America’s

MOST CHURCHES ARE 10 TIMES MORE SEGREGATED THAN THE NEIGHBORHOODS THEY’RE IN, AND 20 TIMES MORE SEGREGATED THAN NEARBY PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

— Michael Emerson, Rice University

churches grew by less than half a million people.

I believe our segregated congregations are one major reason the church in the United States has failed to keep up with the growth of our nation’s population.

Many of those congregations—at least among Protestants—were built using a strategy known as the homogenous unit principle. This principle suggests that churches grow fastest when they are made up of people from the same ethnic, economic, cultural, and educational background.

That principle is based on common sense and human experience. Most of us recognize it’s more natural and much easier to walk, minister, and worship God together with people like us (whoever that *us* is in any given situation).

Yet, as believers, we were not called to do easy things. Instead, we’ve been called to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, in the supernatural, to be one in the church for the sake of the gospel, “according to the power that works within us,” as Ephesians 3:20–4:1 tells us.

Nowhere in the Bible have we been given a pass on degree of difficulty. We are expected to align the church with the will of God.

We must not be hindered in our mission to advance the kingdom of God by the segregation of the local church, which unintentionally undermines the very gospel we proclaim.

It’s long past time to plant, grow, and develop multiethnic, and economically diverse churches, intentionally, biblically, and for the sake of the gospel.

But how do we go about such an important task?

First, we must revisit New Testament teaching concerning church planting, growth, and development, to recognize the very clear and biblical mandate for the multiethnic church. If

we look at the examples of the churches in Antioch and Ephesus, we see churches that displayed the love of God for *all* people. Diverse believers from different cultures learned to walk, work, and worship together as one, so the world would know God's love and believe (John 17:20-23; Acts 11:19-26 and 13; Ephesians 2:11-3:6). Men and women of various backgrounds came together to obey the Great Commandment, declare a great compassion, and fulfill the Great Commission. Their unity of mind, heart, and purpose resulted in a great expansion of the gospel.

The pursuit of multiethnic churches today must be firmly rooted in God's Word. In other words, it's not about racial reconciliation; it's about reconciling men and women to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Here are seven core commitments to help your church pursue the joys of a multiethnic ministry.

1. Embrace dependence. There are no simple solutions or shortcuts for what only God can accomplish.

2. Take intentional steps. Don't expect to stumble into multiethnicity. A healthy, multiethnic church will be established not by assimilation but rather by accommodation. It will take adjustments in attitudes and actions to enfold diversity into the life of a growing, developing body.

3. Empower diverse leadership. Don't



Mosaic Church is a multiethnic, multicultural congregation in Little Rock, Arkansas.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MARK DEYMAZ

establish quotas or recognize unqualified leaders, but recognize that leaders should reflect the ethnic diversity of God's kingdom.

4. Develop cross-cultural relationships.

Step outside the box of what is most natural and convenient. Remember, these relationships take time to form and cannot be agenda driven.

5. Pursue cross-cultural competence.

Become familiar with the cultures to which you're ministering to gain insight and to avoid unnecessary mistakes.

6. Promote a spirit of inclusion.

Create an environment in which diverse people not only feel welcome but also feel they are a significant part of the whole. In other words, be ready to surrender personal preferences to serve others. The ability to accommodate various forms of evangelical faith and worship

without compromising doctrinal beliefs is essential.

7. Mobilize for impact. Leverage multiethnicity to effect transformation both culturally and spiritually, both locally and globally.

The multiethnic church is a work of God and cannot be accomplished through human means and effort. With this in mind, only the power of the Holy Spirit along with prayer, patience, and persistence can move us forward.

In the 21st Century, it will be the unity of diverse believers walking as one—in and through the local church—that will proclaim the fact of God's love for all people and provide the most effective means for reaching the world with the gospel. ■

Mark DeYmaz (@MarkDeYmaz) is pastor of Mosaic Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, and leads the Mosaic Global Network (Mosaicx.info).

Mosaic church

By Mike Gammill

Sometimes one question can change your life.

For Mark DeYmaz, it happened in the fall of 2000, while getting a haircut. At the time, DeYmaz was thinking about a new church, where people from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities could worship God as one.

He told his hairstylist, a woman named Precious, about his idea.

“Mark, do you think it could ever happen here?”

For the past 13 years, the answer has been “Yes.” About a year after his conversation with Precious, DeYmaz and his family started Mosaic, a church “to reach people of all class, colors, and background.”

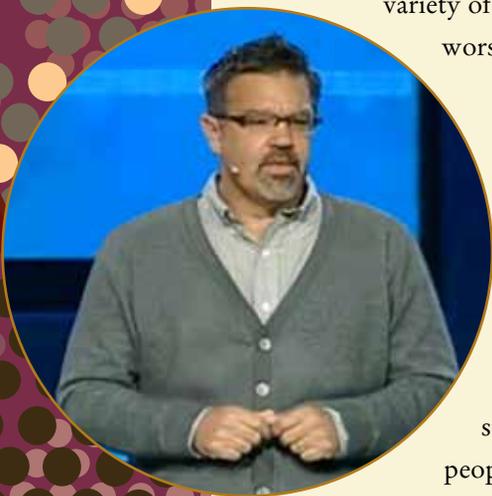
Since launching, Mosaic has grown into a congregation that includes believers from 30 nations who now gather to worship God in unity.

Among the believers at Mosaic is a man originally from Syria, who arrived in Little Rock one month before September 11, 2001. When he first visited Mosaic, he had two questions: Do Christians really experience joy in worshipping Christ? How many Christians could he convert to Islam?

He kept coming back to Mosaic, and he was converted after he encountered the light of Christ and met welcoming Christians who knew God as a loving and forgiving Father.

Some churches wonder if they should be more diverse. Some pastors wonder how they can make diversity a reality. DeYmaz says Mosaic became diverse by focusing on redemption, and “bringing life to a depressed community.” ■

Mike Gammill is a lead navigator for Auxano (Auxano.com).

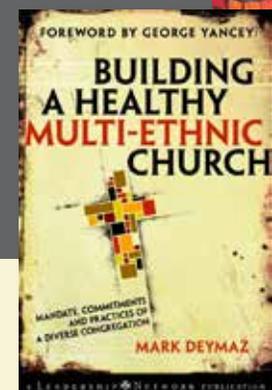
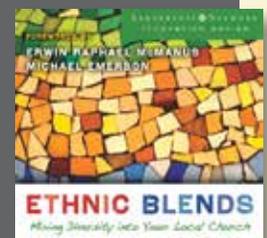


Mark DeYmaz

DIG DEEPER

For further reading, check out these books by Mark DeYmaz.

- *Ethnic Blends*
- *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*
- *Leading a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*



The DNA of diversity



Above: Adam Edgerly, lead pastor of NewSong, LA.

How a Los Angeles church cultivated a multiethnic ministry right from the start

By Patti Townley-Covert

Adam Edgerly preaches from the Bible. And that's where he found the mandate for pastors to cultivate multiethnic churches.

“There’s a pattern in Scripture of God deliberately making His people a culturally adaptable people,” says Edgerly, lead pastor of NewSong Los Angeles Church. “We see that pattern from Abraham to Joseph to Moses, Ruth, David, Esther, Daniel, and those in captivity.”

It’s throughout the New Testament as well. The book of Acts tells the story of the Church’s struggle to move beyond a Jewish context to the rest of the world. “In its DNA, the Church is a multiethnic community,” says Edgerly. “To do church without thinking about that betrays part of the story of Christianity. In its origin, this is who we are.”

That’s why from its beginning in 2003, NewSong has strategically worked on being culturally adaptable.

Becoming intentional

When hiring staff, Edgerly says NewSong considers not only a candidate’s professional qualifications, but also how the individual relates to a part of the community that might otherwise remain off-limits. The leadership team needs to be representative of those they want to reach.

(continues on page 29)



NewSong’s new building.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NEWSONG

(continued from page 28)

So does Sunday morning worship. Research helped NewSong discover what its target audience listens to on the radio. In the beginning, the worship band rewrote the lyrics to R & B and hip-hop songs to reflect a biblical message, says Edgerly. Adding a funk beat behind Christian contemporary songs also helped create a sense of familiarity for the unchurched.

At NewSong you'll find Chinese, Koreans, African-Americans, Caucasians, Latinos, Kenyans, Nigerians, Caribbean Islanders, and others from around the globe worshipping together.

At the same time, NewSong's vision reaches far beyond Sunday services. This missional community of about 200 people works together to impact the world by using the arts, technology, business—whatever means possible—to reach the marginalized and unchurched.

After the leadership decided roughing it was okay, NewSong remained a mobile church for almost a decade. Meeting in hotels and high schools allowed the church to grow, but also brought some hard lessons. No matter what socioeconomic class people were from, they wanted to feel comfortable and safe. Problems with location, sound, temperature control, and a children's ministry too far from the sanctuary weren't appreciated.

NewSong also experienced challenges with cultivating socioeconomic diversity. Meeting in a senior center meant everyone had to leave immediately following the service. They adjourned to a local restaurant—until someone asked

about those who couldn't afford a meal. Better options included potlucks at various locations and setting aside funds for those in need. Now, housed in a permanent building, designated members watch for new visitors and invite them to stay after the service for food and conversation.

Community service remains a high priority and is an opportunity for this diverse community to connect around shared values and mission. However, instead of starting new projects, New-

“*The shape of the church and its methods may change, but the message of Jesus never does.*”

— Adam Edgerly

Song finds organizations doing good ministry and joins them.

Age diversity within the church presents additional opportunities for connecting. When seniors spend time with young people from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups, they begin learning from one another, says Edgerly. NewSong facilitates events that further this dynamic. A film night depicting cross-cultural friendships can spark opportunities for conversation.

Developing our identity

Edgerly believes such intercultural relationships incorporate critical components for their church because:

1. “We have a multiethnic directive by Jesus.” In Matthew 28:19, He said: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” He also said to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the Earth.

2. “We have a multiethnic DNA that produces unity.” At the Tower of Babel, God separated a sinful people by making them speak different languages. But in Acts 2, He brought His people back together in Christ by giving believers the ability to speak the languages of nations. As a result 3,000 people joined the church that first day.

3. “We have a multiethnic destiny.” In Revelation 7, when John saw a panoramic view of what the Church looked like in heaven, he saw every

nation, every tribe worshipping the Lord together. John recognized these various people groups because “we are still distinct in heaven.”

In their efforts to adapt to different cultures while maintaining biblical distinctions, Newsong likes to think outside the box. Actor Bruce Lee captured this creative philosophy by saying: “When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup. When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. When you pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. . . . Be water my friend.”

“Water always stays water,” explains Edgerly. “The gospel and the church should function that way. The shape of the church and its methods may change, but the message of Jesus never does.” ■

Patti Townley-Covert (@PTCovert) is a writer and editor living in Ontario, California.

NONE OF THE ABOVE

Who are the nones and how do we reach them?

By Carol Pipes

What is your religious preference?

- Christian – Catholic
- Christian – Orthodox (Russian, Armenian, Greek)
- Christian – Protestant
- Christian – Non-Denominational
- Jewish
- Mormon / Latter Day Saints
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- Christian Scientist
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Unity/Militarian
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- None of Above
- Other: _____

James Emery White is senior pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, and adjunct professor of theology and culture at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His latest book *Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* describes the fastest-growing religious group of our time. Between 1990 and 2008, the number of *nones*, those who indicate no religious preference, leaped from 8.1 percent to 15 percent. In 2012 that number climbed to nearly 20 percent, representing 1 of every 5 Americans. His book offers a comprehensive look at the *nones* and how churches can reach them. We caught up with White to ask him about this growing group.

Q&A with James Emery White

What was the motivation behind this book?

Without a doubt, the *nones* constitute the religious story of our day. They are now the second-largest and fastest-growing religion in America. As the pastor of a church committed to reaching out to those far from God, knowing about the *nones* is paramount. Yet this is such a new phenomenon, there hasn't been anything written about it from a Christian perspective explaining this group and suggesting ways to respond. As the subtitle of the book says, it's about understanding and reaching the *nones*.

What are some characteristics of a typical *none*?

We could walk through many basic demographic markings, and I outline those in the book, but the two headlines that should jump out are these: they are not atheists, and they are not seekers.

Both of these findings address the typical caricatures people would understandably have. You would assume someone who says they are nothing would be an atheist, but the vast majority aren't atheists. They would consider themselves quite spiritual, just not religious. As for the seeker label, that doesn't apply. They are not looking for a particular religion, much less a church home. They are quite content where they are.

What are some of their beliefs?

That's more difficult to pin down, as there is great variety. But you can certainly count on them reflecting the dominant values of the culture. For example, "tolerance," defined as all things equally true and valid and thus equally affirmed. The *nones* would be liberal in orientation on almost every social issue. They would also consider many Christians to be judgmental, intolerant, and unloving. In other words, they don't think we look much like Jesus.

“Too many churches are taking an Acts 2 approach in an Acts 17 world.”

—James Emery White

You write that *nones* are not necessarily leaving the faith or denying the faith, but they don't want to be labeled Christian. Can you unpack this trend?

It really is about labels, and what comes with labels. To be labeled is to be identified as something, and with that identification comes a set of beliefs, values, or lifestyle norms. They don't want that. They don't really believe in orthodoxy in its historic Christian sense, and labels reflect at least some set of transcendent beliefs.

How should the church adapt its approach to outreach and evangelism?

That's what the book is about, so let me see if I can offer a simple overarching theme. I would suggest churches

Keys to having an open front door

By James Emery White

According to LifeWay Research, 63 percent of Americans say a personal invitation from a friend or neighbor was an effective way to be invited to a church. And if you could get them there, imagine what you could achieve. They could be exposed to the collective energies, gifts, resources, and influence of your church at its best. But how should your church be positioned optimally for the *nones*? How do you open the front door to someone you have invited who may actually come?

Friendliness—You must be intentional about the guest's experience and cultivate an atmosphere of acceptance.

Children's Ministry—Children are the heart of your growth engine. And if *nones* ever come to your church uninvited, it will probably be for the sake of their kids.

Music—Music matters, and the key is cultural translation. And remember, there's no such thing as traditional music.

Building—From the moment when *nones* first view the church and its grounds, the initial impression is made; physical surroundings convey strong messages.

Importance of the Visual—Over the last 20 years, we have decisively moved to a visually based world, and the church needs to move with it.

Adapted from James Emery White, The Rise of the Nones, Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, ©2014, Used by permission.

move from an Acts 2 model to an Acts 17 model. By that I mean that in Acts 2, you had Peter addressing the God-fearing Jews of Jerusalem. On a spiritual scale from one to 10, they were probably an eight. They believed in God, the Old Testament scriptures, heaven and hell, and a promised Messiah. That's a lot to begin with! And Peter fashioned his approach accordingly. Fast forward to Paul in Acts 17. On our imaginary scale, they were probably about a two. Paul didn't approach them as God-fearing Jews, but as the (at best) agnostics that they were. He had to start with creation and work his way forward. He understood that evangelism, for that group, would involve both process and event. Too many churches are taking an Acts 2 approach in an Acts 17 world.

How do you have a spiritual conversation with someone who doesn't care about God?

If they have hardened thoughts, it's less with theology and more with characterization. They often have very negative views of religion, and often, religious people. But if you can get past that, they are quite willing to hear an explanation of the Christian perspective on any and every issue. Particularly, if you start out with their questions and concerns as a bridge to the Bible.

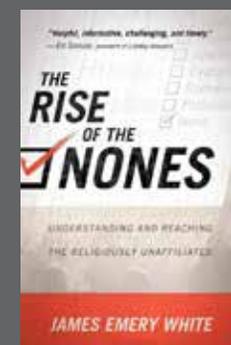
Your church has been reaching the unaffiliated for 20 years. How are you doing that?

Strategies come and go; they change and evolve. But what hasn't changed for us is the centrality of the mission, and the culture that has resulted from making that mission central. I know a lot of churches talk about this, but at Mecklenburg, being turned outward and focusing all of our outreach on those far from God really is our DNA. It's not just rhetoric, but a deep and pulsating value. From that, we are able to do whatever it takes, in whatever era of history we find ourselves, to reach those who are not followers of Christ. ■

Carol Pipes (@CarolPipes) is editor of Facts & Trends.

DIG DEEPER

- *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* by James Emery White



Who is John Q. Nones?

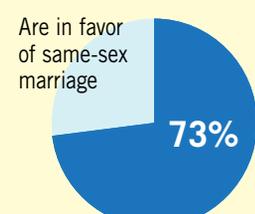
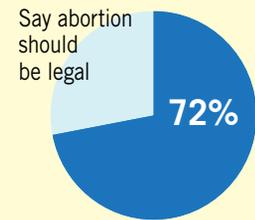
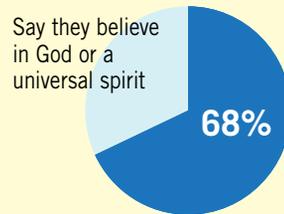
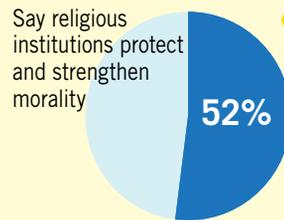
By Lauren Markoe

Meet John Q. Nones, a young, white male who is making a big impression on the American religious landscape for something he doesn't do: align with any religious group.

The rise of the religiously unaffiliated, or nones, as documented in a study from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, has major implications for almost all aspects of American life—from religion to business to culture. Here's a snapshot drawn from the Pew Forum's poll:

- 1. He's a he.** Though fewer than half of Americans are male, 56 percent of nones are. The gender divide among nones who are atheists or agnostics is even more pronounced: 64 percent of this group is male.
- 2. He's young.** The older the American, the more likely he or she is to be affiliated with a religion. One-third of Americans under 30 say they have no religious affiliation, compared to 9 percent of those 65 and older. This is mostly due to “generational replacement” as a younger generation assumes the place of an older one that is decidedly more religious.
- 3. He's white.** Of all nones, 71 percent are white, 11 percent are Hispanic, 9 percent are black and 4 percent are Asian. If you narrow the pool to just agnostics and atheists, the group is even whiter: 82 percent.
- 4. He's not necessarily an atheist.** The largest group of nones (68 percent)

Beliefs among nones:



say they believe in God or a universal spirit. Within that group, 30 percent of them are certain God exists. Another 27 percent of nones say there is no God.

5. He's not very religious. This may sound obvious, but it makes the distinction between a person who has no religious affiliation, and one who is not religious. There are some nones who do consider themselves religious—just outside the confines of a religious organization. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of nones seldom or never attend religious services.

6. He's a Democrat. Nones are among the most reliably Democratic of voters. In 2008, three-quarters of them voted for Barack Obama and 23 percent for John McCain, making them as strongly Democratic as white evangelicals were Republican.

7. He thinks abortion and same-gender marriage should be legal. Big gaps separate nones and Americans in general on these issues. While 53 percent of the general public say abortion should be legal in all or most circumstances, 72 percent of the unaffiliated do. And

while 48 percent of the general public favors same-sex marriage, 73 percent of nones do.

8. He's liberal or moderate. And not just on the issues above. More than three-quarters of the unaffiliated describe themselves as generally liberal or moderate, compared to the 1-in-5 of them who call themselves conservative.

9. He's not necessarily hostile toward religious institutions. He just doesn't want to belong to one. More than half of the nones (52 percent) say religious institutions protect and strengthen morality, though an even greater proportion (70 percent) believes these institutions are too concerned with money and power.

10. He's more likely a Westerner. Nones are most concentrated in the West and least concentrated in the South. While 23 percent of Americans live in the West, 30 percent of nones do. ■

Lauren Markoe (@LMarkoe) is a writer for Religion News Service from which this article was adapted. Copyright 2012 Religion News Service. Used by permission.

STATE *of the* UNION

Real secrets of a happy marriage

By Bob Smietana

Go to bed angry. Always keep score. And remember, honesty is not always the best policy.

Those are some of the unexpected tips for wedded bliss from best-selling author and social researcher Shaunti Feldhahn in her recent book, *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*.

Feldhahn interviewed and surveyed more than 1,000 couples for the book. She then sorted those couples into categories, from struggling to highly happy. In doing so, she hoped to find the habits and attitudes that separate so-so marriages from spectacular ones.

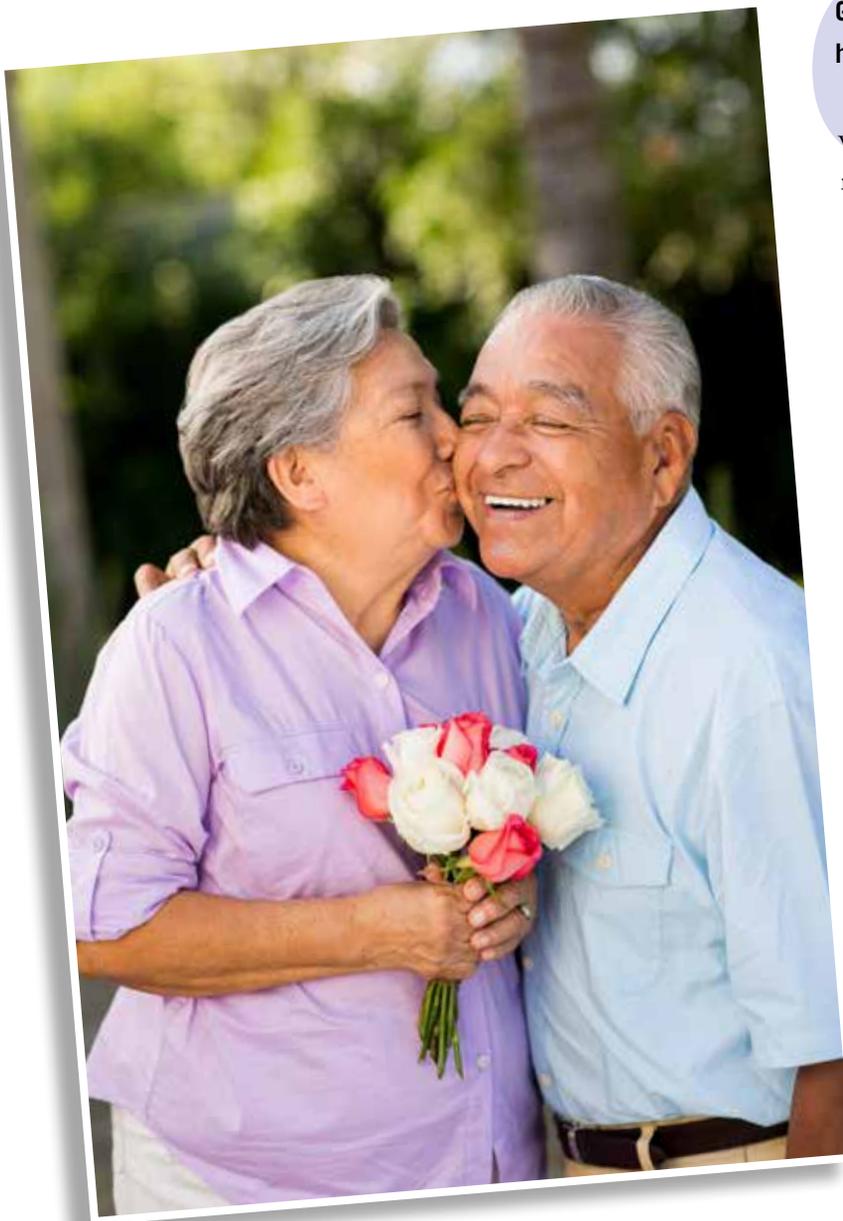
She highlights a dozen of those habits in her book. Among her findings: small things like saying “thank you” and showing affection in public really matter.

“By far the biggest surprise to me was how big these little things were,” says Feldhahn.

She points to a conversation with a friend whose marriage went through a crisis and later a divorce. Her friend’s husband worked long hours to provide for the family, but paid her little attention. Their marriage eventually unraveled.

“He worked so hard for a year to take us on that amazing vacation to Hawaii,” the friend told Feldhahn. “But all I really wanted was for him to put his arm around me in church.”

Other day-to-day habits, like leaving a voice



message or sending an email that says “I love you,” or praising your spouse in public were commonplace for the happiest couples in Feldhahn’s study. She also discovered the happiest couples tend to ignore conventional advice, such as the idea that you should never go to bed angry.

Most of the couples Feldhahn interviewed say they agree with that advice. Then she asked them, “Do you go to bed mad?”

“They told me, ‘well it’s a really important principle’ and then they would start backtracking,” she says.

It turned out that many of the happiest couples Feldhahn interviewed had learned how to put their disagreements on hold at times. Instead of duking things out at night, when both spouses were tired and irritable, these couples tend to wait till the morning, when cooler heads will prevail, she says.

“The difference between the happy couples and the less than happy couples isn’t what happened the night before, it’s what happened in the morning,” she says. “If the hurt feelings were still there, the happy couples dealt with it. The less than happy couples ignored the problem and hoped it would go away.”

Along with surveys, Feldhahn relied on a series of follow-up interviews with happily-married couples in writing her book.

Many have found creative and sometimes humorous ways to reconcile after a conflict. Some crack jokes. Others share a cup of coffee or a hug. One couple touches pinkies after a fight.

Almost all of them had some kind of secret signal to say that everything was going to be OK, says Feldhahn. Of the happy couples she surveyed, 7 out of 10 say they have

“HIGHLY HAPPY COUPLES TREAT EACH OTHER WITH INTENTIONAL KINDNESS.”

—Shaunti Feldhahn

a “we’re OK” signal after conflicts. Only 1 in 5 (22 percent) of the struggling couples had a similar signal.

Feldhahn believes those small signs or signals can solidify a married couple’s relationship. The couples intentionally reaffirm their commitment to one another at the end of each conflict.

Feldhahn says even the happiest couples are insecure at times. That’s a normal part of being human. And those insecurities worsen during conflict, says Feldhahn. A bit of humor, a funny habit, or a hug can help set things straight.

So can a habit of kindness.

Most of the happily married couples



Feldhahn interviewed have learned to be careful in how they speak to each other. Brutal honesty, she discovered, can be counterproductive.

“Highly happy couples treat each other with intentional kindness,” she writes. “They joke and challenge, but they try never to do it in ways their mate would perceive as disrespectful or hurtful.”

Honesty is important in marriage, says Feldhahn. But the happiest couples have realized that sarcasm or harsh comments may not be the best way to share feedback. If your spouse gets on your nerves, tell them, she says. But don’t be harsh or use brutal honesty as a way to get back at your spouse.

Generosity also matters. Feldhahn found that most of the happiest couples in her surveys and interviews are surprisingly competitive—at least when it comes to taking care of their spouse and family. If one of them has a hard week or has taken on extra responsibilities—like caring for sick kids—the other will essentially try to pay them back.

“We always say, ‘don’t keep score in marriage,’” she says. “But it turns out happy couples absolutely do keep score. They just keep score differently. They keep score of what the other person is giving, and then try to outdo each other.”

Over the last decade, Feldhahn has shown a knack for turning her insightful research and pithy writing into best-selling books about relationships with titles like *For Women Only* and *For Men Only*.

Both of those skills are on display in

The *Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*, which features chapters on how happy couples “Have Factual Fantasies,” “Don’t Tell it Like it Is,” and “Get In Over Their Heads.”

The “Factual Fantasy Chapter” revolves around a survey question about unmet expectations. Most (75 percent) of the struggling couples in Feldhahn’s survey say they were bothered when their spouse didn’t live up to their expectations. Less than half (46 percent) of the highly happy couples say this was an issue. About a quarter of those

couples (23 percent) say they didn’t have unmet expectations.

A similar chapter, called “Believe the Best,” reports that almost all the happiest couples (99 percent) say they believe their spouse cares for them, even in the midst of an argument. By contrast, only 59 percent of the struggling couples felt their spouse cared for them, even if they were arguing.

Feldhahn says this question about whether your spouse really cares for you—even in the midst of conflict—is crucial.

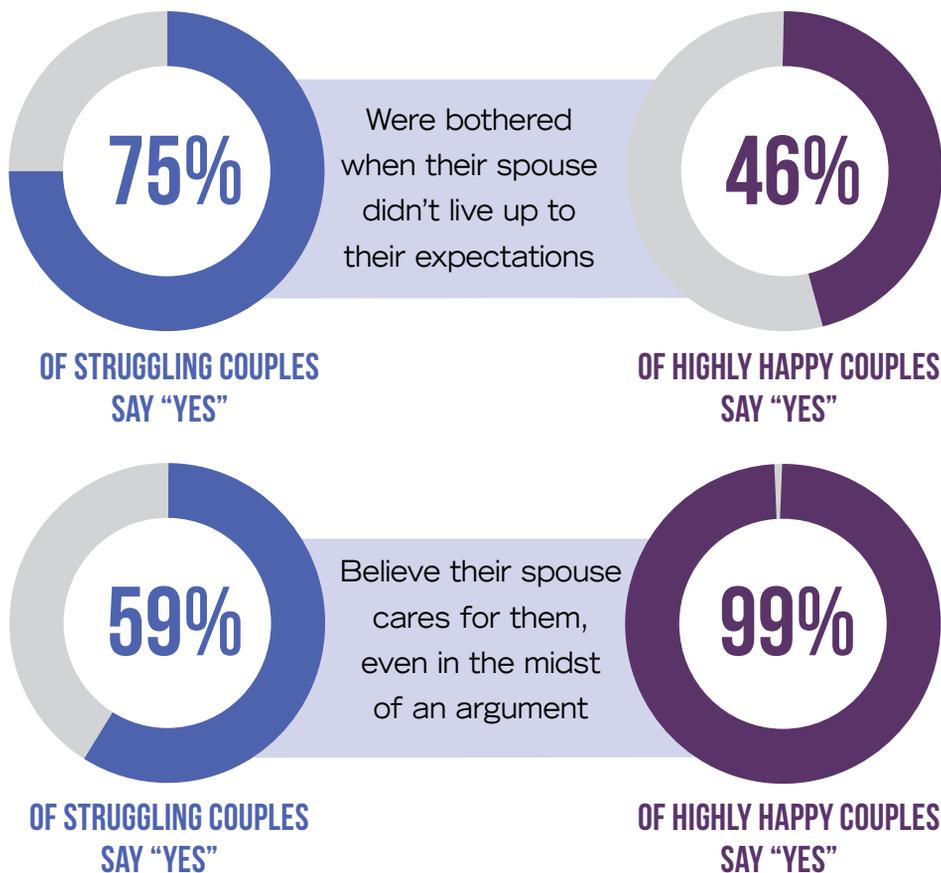
“If you are going to have a happy marriage, you cannot believe the worst of your spouse’s intentions,” she says. “You have to stop yourself from doing that. Happy couples believe their spouse really cares for them. Unhappy couples don’t let themselves believe the truth.”

Among the most important findings, says Feldhahn, is the idea that the happiest couples are “all in.” They really do want to stay together “till death do us part” and don’t have a Plan B.

She says many newly married people think they need to keep a separate bank account or set aside a nest egg, in case their marriage fails. That’s counter-productive, she says.

“The act of trying to protect yourself—in case it all goes wrong—is more likely to make it all go wrong,” she says.

During her research, Feldhahn says





Divorce: setting the record straight

Author and social researcher Shaunti Feldhahn wants to get a few things straight about marriage and divorce in the United States. For decades, Americans have heard the divorce rate in the U.S. is around 50 percent. But Feldhahn says that while some subgroups have higher divorce rates the overall average has never hit 50 percent.

Most married people say they are happy, says Feldhahn. Nearly three quarters (72 percent) of currently married people are still with their first spouse.

“Yes, there is some really bad news out there,” writes Feldhahn. “But the good news is out there too. And it can give some much needed encouragement to marriages today.”

Most of the statistics about marriage, including the idea that half of marriages fail, are based on past U.S. Census department *projections*, says Feldhahn. But those projections were made at a time when the divorce rate was skyrocketing. If the trend had continued we would have hit 50 percent, she explains. But the divorce rate peaked around 1980.

So what’s the exact divorce rate? Nobody knows.

One of the best sources, says Feldhahn, is a 2011 report from the Census Bureau, which surveyed more than 55,000 Americans about their marital history.

The group with the highest divorce rate, says Feldhahn, were women ages 50-59. About 4 in 10 (41 percent) of that age group had been divorced at some point, according to her analysis of the census data. Overall, 31.8 percent of ever-married women had been divorced.

That’s too high, she says, but far short of the claim that half of marriages end in divorce.

Census data shows more than half of couples (55 percent) in the U.S. have been married at least 15 years. And in most cases (72 percent), both the husband and wife are in their first marriage. Second marriages also show a fairly high success rate: two-thirds (65.3 percent) of people who’ve been married twice are still married to that second spouse.

Feldhahn says this new data gives pastors and married couples the ability to set realistic expectations for their success. Most marriages will succeed, she says. And believing their marriage will succeed can actually help married couples get through the hard times.

“If a couple thinks, ‘we aren’t going to make it,’ then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy,” she says. “If they think, ‘we are going to make it,’ they usually do.” ■

she talked to a number of couples who’d been on the edge of divorce at one point in the past, but who have become happy.

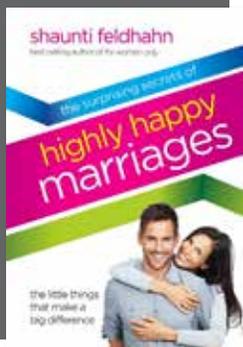
Becoming happy involved a lot of work for those couples, she says. Things started to get better when both spouses became fully committed to the long-term success of their marriage.

“They decided there is no Plan B—we are going to work this out, because we are going to be together for the rest of our lives,” she says. “That level of commitment changes everything.” ■

Bob Smietana (@BobSmietana) is senior writer and content editor of Facts & Trends.

DIG DEEPER

- *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages* (Multnomah) by Shaunti Feldhahn
- *Love for a Lifetime* (LifeWay) by Dr. James Dobson
- *The Love Dare Bible Study* (LifeWay) by Michael Catt and Alex and Stephen Kendrick
- *The Art of Marriage* (LifeWay) by multiple authors





CALIBRATE

Practical ministry ideas for your church

4 ways to create volunteer energy for lasting ministry

By Chris Mavity

I'm a firm believer that as your volunteers go, so goes your church.

With that in mind, it's vital for pastors and church leaders to continually invest in volunteers. You can make a number of investments in your volunteers: training, support, personal care, and encouragement, to name a few. However, the most significant investment—and biggest payoff—is to invest in energy.

Why? Nothing good happens without the expenditure of energy, usually massive amounts of it. Growth, movement, and accomplishment all require the consumption of significant amounts of spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental energy. In fact without energy, death is imminent.

When it comes to the volunteers in your ministry, where does the required energy come from?

Energy drinks like Red Bull or Monster? Pep rallies or rah-rah sessions before an event? Emotional pleas providing instant but shallow responses? Relying on one leader to energize the whole?

While seemingly effective, the energy derived from those sources provides temporary and artificial solutions to the long-term need for renewable and sustainable ministry energy. When you rely upon a cyclical pattern of urgent activity, a quick-fix mentality and

shortsighted thinking take hold and cripple the ongoing health and vitality of your ministries.

The energy required for significant and scalable ministry development must be accessible, renewable, and sustainable—not only to you but to all your volunteers as well.

Here are four surefire ways to provide sustainable energy for your ministry:

1. Connect to the spiritual energy source, the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter *how* you connect, but it's vital *that* you connect. Prayer, music, conversation, reading, walks, serving, worship, or alone time are effective connection practices. Find the ones that work for you and practice them often. Encourage your volunteers to do the same (John 14-17).

2. Celebrate the wins. A victory creates energy. In ministry you must clearly articulate what the wins are, and then acknowledge and celebrate them when they occur. Take note that even the smallest win creates energy for the individuals and teams in your ministry. As you get in the habit of celebrating ministry wins, you'll notice the energy level increases. And your volunteer team will have more energy for the next go-round.

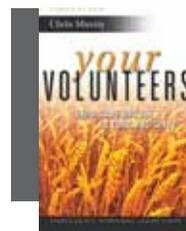
3. Share the stories. Volunteers gain confidence, faith, and encouragement when they hear how God is working

in and through them and others. You may not be able to tell every story, but you can share some of the stories of God at work and the positive changes that are occurring. The energy created through storytelling is unmistakable and often will inspire others to join the team.

4. Prepare the place. Provide volunteers the best possible environment in which to work. Clean, de-clutter, freshen, and provide refreshments. Repair or replace broken equipment or fixtures. Provide the tools and resources necessary to complete assignments. Make sure the space is ready for them to do what they've volunteered to do.

The energy required to accomplish anything of significance is crucial. Utilizing artificial energy sources means you'll face a constant battle in ministry you may never overcome. If you and your volunteers connect, celebrate, share, and prepare, you'll continue to create and renew the energy required to serve to greatest capacity. ■

Chris Mavity (@ChrisMavity) is executive director at North Coast Training – A ministry of North Coast Church, Vista, California—and is the author of Your Volunteers: From Come and See to Come and Serve.



DIG DEEPER

- *Your Volunteers* by Chris Mavity
- MinistryGrid.com

Groups Matter

5 sure-fire ways to kill a small group

By Robert Noland

We all want our small groups to grow. But sometimes those groups—like individual people—develop some bad habits. Those habits can work against growth and eventually kill the community we're trying to establish. Here are five things your small group may be doing now that, if not corrected, will kill it.

1. Let the group leader do all the talking.

A true small group with the goal of spiritual growth among its members is not the place for one person to do all the teaching. A good leader needs to facilitate discussion so everyone can wrestle with the Bible text at hand. But that's often harder than it looks.

Navigating personalities and emotional needs inside a group is a sensitive matter—one that should be approached with much prayer and full submission to the Holy Spirit, so God will accomplish what only He can among His people. The goal is for members to each share, for God to speak, and the leader to connect the two.

2. Make sure gossip is on the agenda.

Satan loves to use a group inside the church, gathered with the intention of growing its members, for creating and distributing gossip. A small group can be a place where rumors and conflict spread.

Members of a small group should be encouraged to talk about their relationship with God and about any personal struggles they're dealing with. It's meant to be a safe place for that. And there may be times when a small group member should bring up a conflict with someone inside the church, but the



group should present biblical solutions and create accountability to help them resolve the issue. If members of a small group begin to regularly talk about others, problems in the church, or issues with leadership, the enemy is already in the house.

3. Focus on the negative.

Our world is crying for hope. As Christians, we hold the hope of the world in our hearts. While we must deal with personal problems and issues up-front and honestly in our group, we should always steer each member toward the positive outcome God may have in store.

If our group dynamic becomes a place to only discuss how “bad the world is,” we may lose hope ourselves. Our small groups should be a place of sharing burdens, encouragement, and inspiration to trust God no matter what.

4. Let opinion push the Bible out of your group.

An immature small group can sometimes make personal opinion the solution for each other's issues. If the phrase, “well, this is what I think you should do” is often heard, the group has become a self-help meeting, not a

Christian growth group.

Looking together at Scripture to seek and share God's answers for each member's struggles can be a unifying and strengthening experience. The Bible contains the words of life by which we live and for which we meet. Therefore, we must make it the center and the standard for each gathering.

5. Keep prayer only for blessing the snacks.

Praying for each other is incredibly encouraging and unifying. And seeing the results of our prayers over time is a confirmation of our faith and commitment, and more importantly, of God's faithfulness and goodness to us.

Make sure you allow enough time for prayer. If the leader finds himself or herself frequently saying, “Oh, we're out of time. Can someone just close in prayer?” a huge blessing is being cut out of your time together. Be sure to protect time for praying for all the needs expressed by your group each time you meet.

A small group that's centered on Jesus and is committed to God's Word and prayer will offer a balanced and healthy opportunity for members to grow in grace. ■

Robert Noland (@KnightsCode) has been in ministry for more than 30 years. He's a writer living in Franklin, Tennessee.



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- For more on small group tips, visit groupsmatter.com

BEAT GOD TO THE PUNCH

Philly preacher urges his community to live a grace-filled life

By Tobin Perry

When you preach in the inner city of Philadelphia, you don't have to work hard to convince people of humanity's depravity. The people of Philadelphia's 19121 zip code know depravity. They see it every day—in drug deals, shootings, and families falling apart. You don't have to work hard to convince them of their own sinfulness either. They know how to own their sin.

If the gospel of Jesus Christ were only bad news—that “all have sinned,” the people in 19121 would all be master theologians. Yet Eric Mason, who started Philadelphia's Epiphany Church in 2006, says it's grace that stumps them.

“It's a very transactional culture here,” Mason says. “Take a guy who has gotten out of jail, for him everything is based on a point system. When you're

in jail, there's a principle of reciprocity. If I do something for you, you have to do something for me. Nothing is for free. If I accept something from someone, I better make sure I can deal with their reciprocity system to make this transaction not make me look weaker.”

For the past eight years, Mason has preached the message of grace in one of Philly's toughest neighborhoods, and God has worked powerfully to change lives and grow the church. Today, God has done what looked impossible a decade ago—600 people a week attending worship services, half of those having come to Christ at the church. This robust message of grace is also the theme of Mason's new book, *Beat God to the Punch*.

Mason, who grew up in Washington





“WE CAN’T ALLOW OUR COMMITMENT TO THE GOSPEL TO BE SHAPED BY THE TRANSIENCY OF THE CONTEXT BUT RATHER BY THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD.”

— Eric Mason

D.C., and cut his teeth in ministry in Texas, began Epiphany as a small Bible study of nine people in his home in 2006. The plan was simple—and biblical.

“We sensed our calling—based on Colossians 1:16, ‘all things are made for Christ’—to show off the glory of Christ in every area of life—through Christ-centeredness, commitment, community, conversions, and culturally relevant ministry,” Mason explains.

“NO AREA OF YOUR LIFE IS OFF LIMITS TO HIS LORDSHIP OR HIS GRACE.”

—Eric Mason

Mason says people had been praying for a church in the neighborhood for years—people from every Christian tradition imaginable, including Baptists, charismatics, and Mennonites.

“We’re sailing and surfing on the prayers of people who have been praying for this neighborhood for a 100 years,” Mason says. “We fell into this neighborhood at the right time.”

Riding on the coattails of those prayers, Mason got to work telling people about Jesus, leading them to faith in Him, and teaching them the ways of the gospel. Those he and his team led to Christ reached back into their circles of influence to spread the gospel even faster.

“When people got saved, we didn’t pull them out of their environments

unless they were crack addicts or something,” Mason says. “People began to tell their friends: ‘Hey, man, the Word is being taught. It’s healthy.’”

In an inner-city community that had often been the victim of unhealthy spiritual leaders, Mason—though admittedly not perfect—attempts to be a healthy model of integrity, a good father, and a good husband. Maintaining a ministry of presence among his neighbors that’s rooted in the gospel has been an important part of his pastoral ministry.

Remaining flexible has also been a key part of his ministry over the past eight years. He describes the surrounding community as a fluid ministry context where someone with a Ph.D. at Epiphany could minister side-by-side with a blue-collar worker without a high school diploma. Mason and the other elders of the church have specifically focused on developing a regional church in order to draw both the poor and upper class so the poor don’t have to “bear the burden of the church” on their own.

“Doing ministry in this context demands flexibility,” Mason says. “Because of that, we need a biblical missiological framework. We can’t allow our commitment to the gospel to be shaped by the transiency of the context but rather by the faithfulness of God. We let that bleed into how we do ministry in our context.”

To reach its inner-city neighborhood, Epiphany has served its community in a

variety of ways—from a vibrant collegiate ministry to evangelistic events with 3,000-plus people to a Christmas store where low-income parents are empowered to buy low-cost gifts for their kids.

Born out of his experience as an inner-city church planter, Mason calls his new book *Beat God to the Punch*, a symphony of three ideas—discipleship, the Lordship of Christ, and the grace-filled life.

“God invites us to beat Him to the punch,” Mason says. “His punch is His wrath. He invites us—through the gospel—to beat Him to punching us literally for eternity. Believers who have trusted Him have already beaten Him to the punch. So for them, beating Him to the punch is no longer an issue of His wrath. For them, it’s about living a grace-filled life.”

In a community where nothing is for free and reciprocity is the law of the land, the message of *Beat God to the Punch* is a particularly important one. The struggles of people in the inner city to embrace the grace-filled life have led many to turn to Islam. Mason believes many in his neighborhood simply see grace as weak. Islam, which calls its followers to return good for good and bad for bad, is seen as a stronger alternative. He adds that there are more Muslims in the city than Protestant Christians.

“Once people realize grace isn’t a reciprocity system, they are overwhelmed with joy that God accepts them where

they are, but He doesn’t let them stay where they are,” Mason says. “He’s the one who ushers them—for free—through the process of sanctification to help them be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and have an abundant life.”

Mason points, as an example, to those in his community dealing with homosexuality. He says he has been surprised by how many homosexuals have found their way to Epiphany. As they come, Mason tells them God isn’t expecting them to become “perfectly heterosexual” to become a Christian. He reminds them that God isn’t like the father who views their homosexuality as a public embarrassment and forgets to demonstrate love.

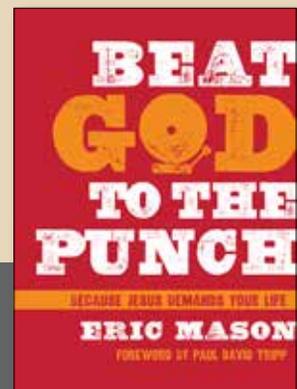
“No one is functionally changed in every area of his or her life [when they come to faith in Christ],” Mason says. “When you become a Christian, you still struggle.”

Mason believes his book can have a profound impact on believers as they embrace this grace-filled Christian life.

“I wanted to write a book that was on the Lordship of Christ but was motivated by grace,” Mason says. “I want people to catch a passion for making disciples in light of this whole idea of Jesus demanding your whole life.

“No area of your life is off limits to His Lordship or His grace.” ■

Tobin Perry (@TobinPerry) is a writer living in Seattle, Washington.



DIG DEEPER

- *Beat God to the Punch*, by Eric Mason

Facts & Trends

2014 Artist & Speaker Guide

Is your church or ministry hosting a special event? Start your planning here! Whether you need a worship leader or a juggler, these gifted artists and speakers are sure to inspire and encourage your audience.



Dr. Dennis Swanberg

Known as "America's Minister of Encouragement," **Dennis Swanberg** is a speaker, entertainer, preacher, humorist, impressionist, and fundraiser. Mike Huckabee calls Dennis one of the funniest people he's ever met, and Dr. David Jeremiah lauds his ability to deliver "side-splitting humor and an encouraging message from God."

www.DennisSwanberg.com
318-325-9044



The Andy Needham Band

Originally from the Northeast, the **Andy Needham Band** is known for their unique ability to lead worship with different instrumentation that serves both young and old. The band is available nationwide for church worship services, DNOWs, youth camps, and more.

www.AndyNeedhamBand.com
508-340-0407

www.lifeway.com/spearguide

Denver & The Mile High Orchestra

Denver & The Mile High Orchestra is a horn-driven band that travels across the world playing churches, conferences, and festivals. Denver's latest album titled "Mile High Hymns" has just released, and a new television series is in the works for this popular big band.

www.behindthevoice.com
615-599-9809



Answers in Genesis speaker

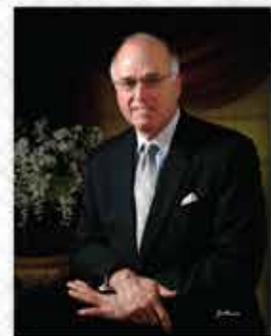
It is possible to wipe out biblical illiteracy, starting now! Invite **Bryan Osborne** to inspire your youth and their parents with newfound confidence in Jesus and His book, the Bible. Discover how easy "apologetics" enriched, through-the-Bible teaching can be!

www.AnswersinGenesis.org
859-727-2222 x403

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www.visionamerica.org
866-522-5582



The Crazy Tie Guy

Nathan Dorrell offers the best mix of entertainment, outreach, and Christian fun! He performs solo — or with his whole family! His wife and seven children juggle, unicycle, walk on stilts over people from the audience, and more! He is an evangelist, a graduate of Southwestern Seminary, and a world champion juggler — holding several world records! He is "The Crazy Tie Guy — America's Minister of Fun!"

www.CrazyTieGuy.com
931-563-2330

Selling out, finally fulfilled

How one family exchanged the American Dream for a new life in South Africa

By Carol Pipes



Joey Lankford's life was almost too perfect.

He and his wife, Courtney, had a successful business near Nashville, Tennessee, a big house in the 'burbs, cars, money, two vacation homes, everything you can imagine.

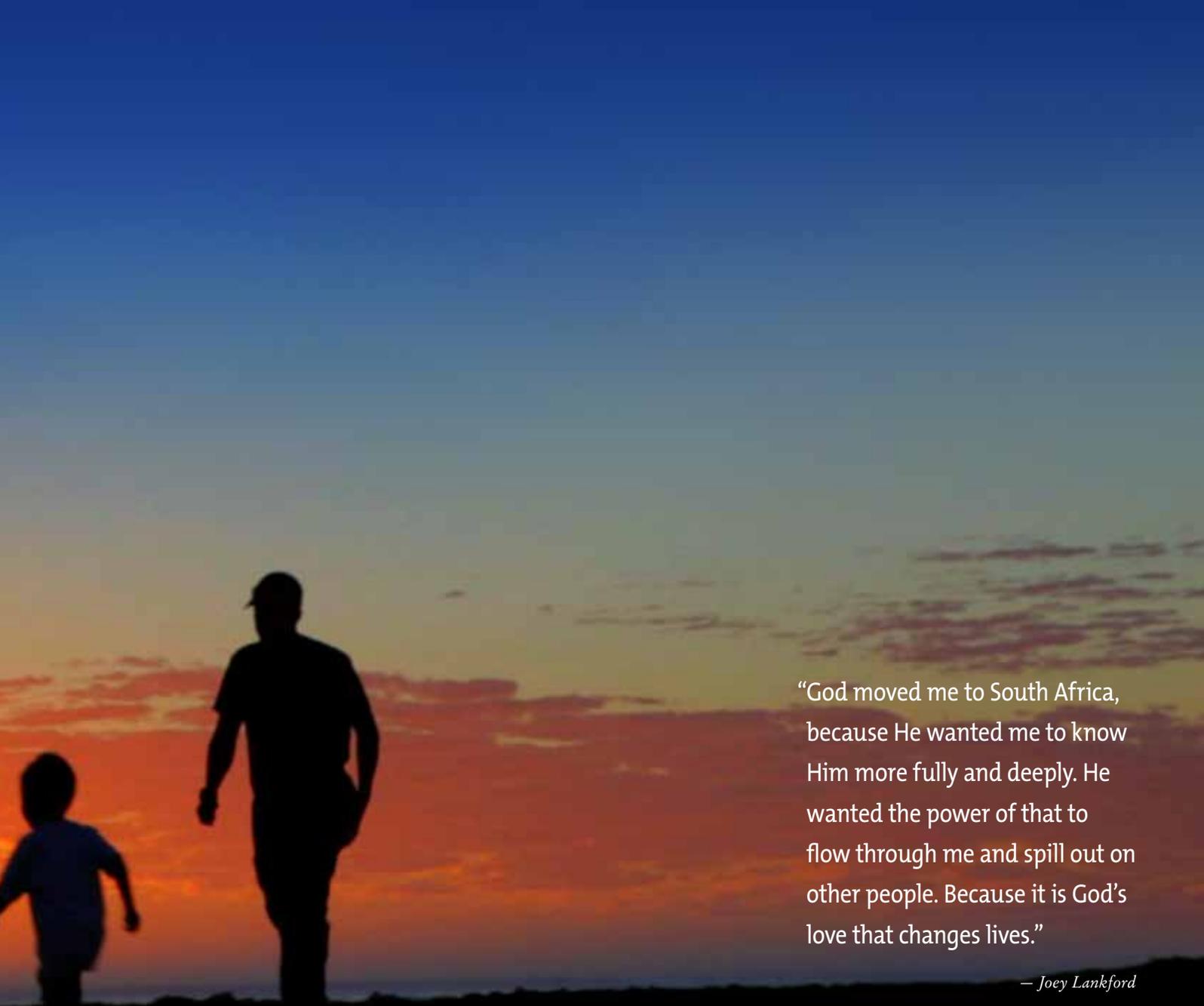
"Life was good. I was making a great salary running the family business; we bought a farm on the south side

of town and built a 5,000-square-foot dream house; we were living the epitome of the American dream.

"At the time, I was content with our lifestyle," says Joey.

But if you ask him where God ranked in his life, he'd say somewhere at the bottom of the list.

"I'd compartmentalized my life into work, family, friends, church, and faith," says Joey. "The cogs weren't



“God moved me to South Africa, because He wanted me to know Him more fully and deeply. He wanted the power of that to flow through me and spill out on other people. Because it is God’s love that changes lives.”

— Joey Lankford

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JOEY LANKFORD

even touching each other.”

In 2008, Joey turned 30. He took a good long look at his life—and his bank account. Materially, nothing was lacking. But deep down he knew something was missing.

“I remember asking myself, *why do I feel like there’s supposed to be more to life than this?*”

That same year Joey’s brother invited him to go on a mission trip to Nicara-

gua with his church. He said yes.

“That trip was a squirt of fuel on a fire that was already burning inside of me,” recalls Joey. “I knew something was extremely wrong with the way I was living my life. I had problems with my wife, problems with my kids, and I felt like faith had zero influence on my daily life.”

He had everything culture said was important, and was absolutely miserable.

One winter night he went down to his barn, settled in on the hay, and began to pray and pour out his heart to God. He stayed in the barn for two more days.

“By Saturday afternoon, I was broken,” says Joey. “I was pleading with God to come to me in that place if He was real.”

God showed up. “God began to reveal to me that He could be the ‘more’

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of my life if I would get down off the throne of my life and put Him there.

“I went back to the house, grabbed Courtney, looked her in the eyes, and told her things were going to be different, that I had surrendered my life to the Lord,” says Joey.

Together they began to pray and ask God for what was next in their lives.

Soon Joey and Courtney began to see God’s provision and plan. He placed a desire in them to serve on the international mission field. With no college degree, much less a seminary degree, this camo-wearing, Tennessee boy couldn’t imagine how God would use him on the mission field.

Through his church in Brentwood, Tennessee, Joey learned of Living Hope, a ministry in South Africa. Living Hope began in 2000 through the work of John Thomas, a local South African pastor, who saw the need to minister to his neighbors who were suffering from HIV/AIDs. The ministry is divided into four areas addressing the problems of healthcare, homelessness, HIV/AIDS education and prevention, and economic empowerment.

The 14-year-old non-profit had begun a job creation and empowerment arm of the organization. That got Joey’s attention.



Joey Lankford



Joey's hydroponic tunnels allow locals to learn hands-on how to grow food and start businesses.



“God said to me, ‘I’m going to use you in the way I’ve wired you—to do business and to love people. I’m going to allow you to develop relationships and connect with as many people as you can get in front of. I’m going to give you something you’re more passionate about than medical equipment.’”

God confirmed to both Courtney and Joey that He was calling them to South Africa. They sold everything and moved the family to a town 30 minutes outside Cape Town, where Joey is using his God-given gifts to equip people with job skills and lead them out of poverty through agricultural business.

Scores of people from rural areas have left their farmlands to come to the city seeking work and a better life, Joey explains. Many never find the dream they’re chasing. Most live in poverty. With the right vision and training, a number of these people can not only supply their daily needs through their farms, but they can develop them into successful businesses.

Joey uses a work-study approach, where students earn a wage while learning hands-on skills. He’s teaching

his students to grow superior quality produce equivalent to what you’d buy at an American Whole Foods. He’s also teaching them to market and sell their product.

The vegetables are grown in 100-foot-long hydroponic tunnels. The program has captured the attention of local restaurant owners as well as South Africa’s elite. Who knew a fancy tomato could level the playing field between the poorest of South Africa and the richest?

Joey has watched several of his graduates go on to start their own businesses, and others find employment at other cooperative farms.

“I haven’t done anything for the South African people that God couldn’t have done with someone else,” Joey says. “God moved me to South Africa, because He wanted me to know Him more fully and deeply. He wanted the power of that to flow through me and spill out on other people. Because it is God’s love that changes lives.”

Joey spends his days working alongside the students, digging in the dirt and discipling them. And he loves it.

He and Courtney now have five

children: Briley, Braxton, Barron, Bristol—who they adopted from Ethiopia—and Baylor, who was born in South Africa last year. They love the life they’ve carved out with their family near the southern-most tip of the continent. Joey tells the story of their journey in his book *Fulfilled*, published this summer by B&H.

He says the book is not about international missions, but rather about surrendering everything to God.

“I want people to know true fulfillment is waiting on the other side of surrender,” he says. “I hope people will come away from reading this book inspired and encouraged to inquire more seriously of God about what He wants of their lives so they can step into that fulfillment.” ■

Carol Pipes (@CarolPipes) is editor of Facts & Trends.



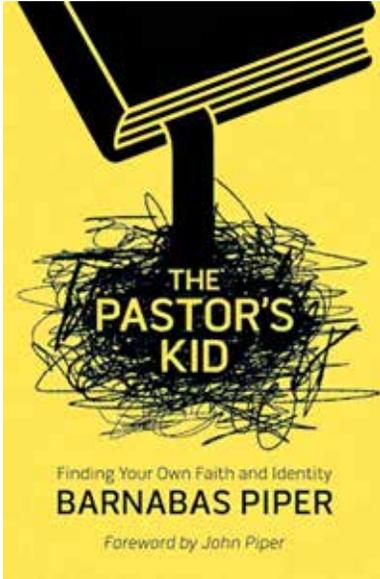
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- *Fulfilled* by Joey Lankford
- LivingHopeDocumentary.com



ON OUR RADAR

Practical resources for you and your church



A Look Inside:

A Q&A with Barnabas Piper on his new book
The Pastor's Kid: Finding Your Own Faith and Identity

Are there things that may set the pastor's kid apart from others in terms of expectations and pressures?

Without a doubt. Being the children of the religious leader creates a set of (false) expectations for PKs—perfect behavior, better Bible knowledge, look immaculate, be a leader, follow in dad's footsteps, etc. All these add up to create a sense of pressure that can be overwhelming.

It also makes it hard for many PKs to figure out who they really are, what God made them to be. They are so burdened by either living up to others' expectations or rebelling against them that they never develop into the men or women God intended.

Looking back, what do you wish people had known about life as a PK while you were growing up?

Lots of things come to mind, but the biggest is that I wish people had viewed me, and other PKs, as normal kids. We needed room to do dumb stuff and be kids. We needed to be applauded for the same things other kids were and reprimanded for the same things. And we needed room to figure out who and what we were, like normal kids. The added expectation and scrutiny took a lot of that away.

How best can church members encourage their pastor and his family?

Remember that humans are all essentially the same—created in God's image but also fallen. Pastors, and by extension their families, aren't any closer to God or more like Him. They are called to a position of leadership and care for a congregation, but are prone to the same mistakes and sins that lay people are.

Basically, a good church member can work hard to follow and respect the pastor as a leader but also remove the pedestal he and his family so often are placed. Placing someone on a pedestal inevitably ends in a long, painful fall.

What can other Christians, who may not be in the ministry, learn from your book?

I think church members who care about their pastor's family would benefit from getting a glimpse behind the curtain. It would help them demythologize the ministry a bit, while also helping them connect in a genuine way with PKs and pastors. ■

Aaron Earls (@WardrobeDoor) is online editor of Facts & Trends.

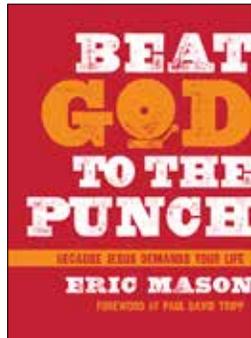
Books & Bible Studies



Faith Is Like Skydiving (And Other Memorable Images for Dialogue with Seekers and Skeptics)

By Rick Mattson (IVP)

Experienced evangelist and apologist Rick Mattson has collected dozens of easy-to-use images for explaining Christianity. With practical tips, this book provides a handy toolkit of memorable and instantly usable images for conversation. You'll be better equipped to give an answer to anyone who asks you about your faith.



Beat God to the Punch: How to Seize a Grace-Filled Life

By Eric Mason (B&H)

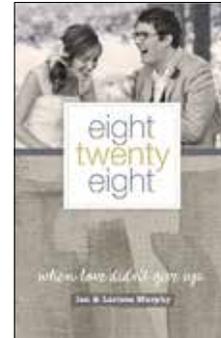
In Beat God to the Punch: How to Seize a Grace-Filled Life author Eric Mason explains God's call of discipleship on every person. He helps us see the areas of life where we try to tell God, "Do not enter." The truth is, God desires to transform every area of our lives. This transformation occurs as we submit ourselves to Jesus. So why not beat God to the punch and seize a grace-filled life?



Go Tell It: How—and Why—to Report God's Stories in Words, Photos, and Videos

By Jim Killam & Lincoln Brunner (Moody Publishers)

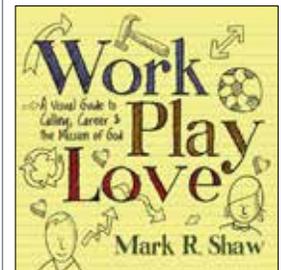
This one-of-a-kind handbook from two journalists-turned-missionaries gives practical tips about how to "report" on what God is doing around the globe. The authors write to help bloggers, missionaries, and world-travelers effectively tell stories of God's work around the globe. This book will help energize the Church for the Great Commission.



Eight Twenty Eight: When Love Didn't Give Up

By Ian & Larissa Murphy (B&H)

They met in college and fell in love. They talked about getting married, and he started looking for a ring. They dreamed about life together. They did not imagine a car accident. They did not imagine his brain injury. They did not dream about the need for constant care. And they could not have imagined how persistent love would be. Theirs and God's. Ian and Larissa Murphy tell their story of love in *Eight Twenty Eight*.



Work, Play, Love: A Visual Guide to Calling, Career, & the Mission of God

By Mark R. Shaw (IVP)

Work. Play. Love. Most of our life is spent in these three areas. But all too often, our work is frustrating, our play is exhausting, and our relationships are challenging. What would it take to have a life of meaningful work, refreshing fun, and great relationships? Guarding against cultural pitfalls, Shaw invites us to discover a deeper calling to playful work and faithful love. There we can experience life as it's intended to be lived—playfully, with freedom and joy.



ON OUR RADAR

Practical resources for you and your church

Conferences & Events



Center for Faith & Work Conference

November 7-8, 2014, New York, New York

Speakers: Tim Keller, Dave Evans, and many more

The annual CFW conference aims to encourage societal leaders' discernment of God at work in the world renewing all things. Conference speakers will emphasize the importance of community and the Holy Spirit's transforming grace both in individual hearts and the world.

FaithandWork.com



Passion Conference

January 2-4 and January 16-18, 2015, Atlanta, Georgia and January 30-February 1, 2015, Houston, Texas

Speakers and artists: Louie Giglio, Chris Tomlin, Matt Redman, Christy Nockels, Kristian Stanfill, David Crowder, and Brett Younker



Passion exists to see a generation leverage their lives for what matters most. Over the years, thousands of college-aged young people have come together at Passion conferences in stadiums and arenas to worship Jesus, be shaped by His Word, and join hands to extend His mercy and grace to the world.

268generation.com



The Liberate Conference

February 19-22, 2015, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Speakers: Tullian Tchividjian, Eric Metaxas, Derwin Gray, J.D. Greear, and more

LIBERATE 2015 is about how to embrace Jesus' message of "it is finished" in a world that shouts the opposite. Attendees will explore how the finished work of Christ affects how Christians approach this exhausting world we live in. This three-day conference promises to be a weekend of freedom, shifting focus from what we have to do, and instead celebrating what Jesus has already done.

Liberate.org



VBS Preview Events

January 9-10, 2015 Ridgecrest Conference Center, Black Mountain, NC

January 16-17, 2015 Fort Worth, TX

January 22-24, 2015 Nashville, TN (three events)

February 6-7, 2015 Kissimmee, FL (two events)

LifeWay will host preview events for those leaders wanting to experience the 2015 theme "Journey Off the Map" a little early. Attendees will learn from experts how churches can best use next year's materials.

LifeWay.com/VBS

Digital

Transformational Church Assessment Tool

Is your church experiencing true gospel transformation? What do people in your congregation think about important issues relating to the work of the church? What do they think about important issues related to spiritual transformation? Assessing the needs of your congregation is essential to developing a church-wide strategy for spiritual growth. The Transformational Church Assessment Tool (TCAT) can provide this kind of information. The goal of this tool is to help churches (any size, any location) make a biblical impact on the lives of their members and on their communities. A few of the key areas TCAT focuses on are missions mentality, leadership, prayer, relationships, worship, group ministry, and mission involvement.

tcat.Lifeway.com



A simple tool to create great one-page websites

Sometimes you don't need a full-blown website. Sometimes what you need is a landing page—a one-page site—to announce a new church campaign or special event. If that sounds like what you're looking for, check out KickoffLabs.com. Steve Kryger of communicatejesus.com writes: "With KickoffLabs I could easily create a landing page, collect and send emails, and view reports on the progress of my campaign. Best of all, it's easy to use—so you don't need to bring in any IT big guns to make it happen."

KickoffLabs.com



Folks we're following

Correcting issues around ethnicity and race for me is not about political correctness, but theological correctness.

@EfremSmith, president and CEO of World Impact

Everyone you envy for success has a story of pain you don't know. Ask them. It's often a lesson of life they enjoy sharing.

@RonEdmondson, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky

An idol is something you will either sin to get or sin if you don't get.

@MattSmethurst, editor at The Gospel Coalition



THE EXCHANGE

The hard truths about multicultural churches

The church is called to be both an instrument and sign of the kingdom of God. As an instrument, the church is God's agent in the world showing and sharing the love of Jesus to a broken and hurting world. And as a sign, the church points to the kingdom of God, acting as a credible witness to its reality and power. People are supposed to look at the church and say, "That's what the kingdom of God looks like." In this sense, it's a window into the kingdom encouraging others to join the fellowship of faith, bound together in Christ.

Revelation 7 says men and women will gather around the throne of God for eternity, and they will come from every tribe, tongue, and nation. But when we look across the landscape of North American churches, most are far too monocultural. There's a lot of talk in our churches and among pastors, leaders, and scholars about the need for our churches to be more multiethnic and multicultural. But it's not often accomplished.

Multiethnic vs. multicultural

Pursuing diversity is a good thing. But we must be clear what we are talking about. A church can be multiethnic if it has persons of different ethnic backgrounds who attend. But if people of various ethnic groups listen to the same music, eat the same foods, hang out at the same entertainment venues, and go to church together, that's not multicultural. They have assimilated to a common culture. It may be multieth-

nic, but it's still monocultural.

Don't get me wrong; both multiethnic and multicultural ministries are good and worth pursuing. But being multicultural is much harder than simply being multiethnic.

A multicultural church will not simply have people who are African-American, but will engage to some degree in African-American cultural contexts. People from Latin America will not only attend, but the church will intentionally engage Latino cultures and contexts. The church will have people who are second-generation Asian immigrants, and will to some degree engage Asian cultural norms. And so on. The multicultural church will seek to celebrate, encourage, accommodate, and even engage those cultures.

The difficult, but necessary work ahead

For those hoping for more diversity in their church, allow me to make some suggestions:

- **Start simple.** Be intentional about getting to know at least one other group in your community.
- **Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes.** If you are white and long for a multicultural church, imagine a black person coming to your white church. Would you consider joining a predominately African-American church? Are you that committed to being part of a church that looks more like the kingdom of God?
- **Be prepared to grow slowly.** The

reality is a multicultural church will grow slower than a monocultural church. It takes time to develop transparency and trust across cultures.

• **Be aware of the challenges and be sober-minded about the barriers to multicultural ministry.** It requires humility and Christlikeness to pursue unity among diverse ethnicities and cultures.

Are you willing to do what it takes to move your church in a more multiethnic and multicultural direction? Are you willing to cross barriers and start a multicultural shift by joining a church of a different ethnicity and culture than your own? Are willing to lay aside your own preferences to be on mission in your community?

These are hard questions without easy answers. But we need to ask them and pursue that which looks more like the kingdom of God.

Scripture clearly reveals diversity around the throne. That's where things are headed. That's what God wants. So if the church, in our increasingly multiethnic and multicultural society, is to be a true instrument and sign of the coming kingdom, it should intentionally pursue such diversity. I am encouraged by the efforts I see, and challenged to move forward in my own life and church for the sake of the gospel. ■

Ed Stetzer (@EdStetzer) is executive director of LifeWay Research. For more visit EdStetzer.com.

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